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MOTHER SAID SO

by

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With a Foreword by

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CONTENTS

Preface	v
Introduction	vii
I. God	1
II. God so Loved	12
III. God so Loved the World	27
IV. God's Plan	35
V. Set Back to God's Plan	52
VI. God . . . Gave	60
VII. His Only-Begotten Son	70
VIII. Whosoever Believeth	79
IX. Believeth on Him	84
X. In Him	88
XI. Should not Perish	103
XII. Eternal Life	110
Note on Hebrew Poetry	118
Note on the Use of the Psalms by the Christian Church	123

FOREWORD

The author of this book is well known as a conductor of missions in Canada and the United States. His addresses are marked by great sincerity and simplicity. For many years he has set forth the truths of the Christian Faith in such a way that they may be readily grasped by all his hearers whatever may be the level of their knowledge or intelligence. This is a great and a rare gift.

In this book Dr. Palmer deals with the Old Testament, and he is most successful in exhibiting its devotional and doctrinal value. The saying of St. Augustine, *Vetus Testamentum in Novo patet*, "The Old Testament is explained in the New," receives in this book many admirable illustrations. The use made of the Book of the Psalms follows the lines of the best scholarship, and at the same time it shows how relevant are these poems to Christian life and worship.

Under the guidance of Dr. Palmer we are never allowed to lose sight of the Divine purpose which is the clue to the proper understanding of all the books of the Bible. He avoids the arbitrary alle-

gorical system of interpretation without losing sight of the deeper meaning of the Old Testament which becomes clear when it is read in the light of the Revelation of the Incarnation. Here is the story of how God disciplined His people and led them step by step, in spite of all their backslidings, into such a knowledge of Himself and His purpose that it was at last possible for Him to reveal Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ. "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in *his* Son."

F. H. COSGRAVE

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INTRODUCTION

When, at the request of the General Board of Religious Education (Publications Department) I was asked to write this Lenten Book, I had in mind as the subject, that long tradition of the revelation of God to mankind, which has come down from the Hebrews and through the Christian Church. I wanted to show to ordinary Church people, in brief outline, that our Lord Jesus is Himself the true Israel of God. He is the faithful remnant of that chosen people, who in a great Mystery, (the mystery of Christ and the Church, Eph. 3:3-9; 5:32.) makes good all the promises of God to His ancient people, fulfills all the hopes and aspirations of that people, and carries out through His Body the Church, the vocation of that Israel, which was to be a royal priesthood to bring the revelation of the one true God to all mankind, Jew and Gentile alike, and to bring all mankind to offer themselves through Christ Himself to the one true God, so making Jew and Gentile, all of mankind, one. To whom does the Prophet refer (Isaiah 41:8; 44:1 & 2 and following chapters) when he speaks of the Servant of God? Some say that he refers to Israel the nation. Some say he refers to Jesus Christ the Messiah. Which is cor-

rect? Both are right for Jesus is the faithful remnant of Israel, so that whatever refers to Israel refers to Him, and through Him to His Body which is the Church. Israel of old was the suffering servant, Jesus is the suffering and faithful Servant. The Church which is his Body will always be a suffering servant, and every member of the Church as a member of Christ's Body will have the cross to bear.

In seeking for suitable Scripture references I have found myself constantly using the Psalms. In the Psalms we have material from many periods in the development of Hebrew religion. The Psalter is their Prayer and Hymn Book. Their creed is best illustrated from their forms of worship. This inclination to look to the Psalms is due to the work I have been doing under the Rev. F. H. Cosgrave D.D. in the Psalter Subcommittee set up by the Prayer Book Revision Committee of General Synod. It is from Dr. Cosgrave, both when I was a student at Trinity College, and in this work on the Psalter, that I have learned almost everything which I know about the Psalms. Wherever in this book there is a correct and illuminating comment on a Psalm,

it is due to Dr. Cosgrave's teaching, wherever there is an error or foolish comment, it is my own and not his. I can never repay the debt I owe to Dr. Cosgrave both for his patient teaching, and for his constant friendship over so many years.

This book would never have been written, but for the wonderful help given to me through the kindness of the Rev. William S. Lea, Rector of Knoxville, Tennessee by his secretarial staff, who typed the manuscript from his dictograph.

The Psalms are for the most part quoted from the revision of the Prayer Book Psalter which was presented to the General Synod at Halifax in September 1949, and which was adopted by the Synod, and authorized for optional use until the next meeting of General Synod. This conservative revision of the Coverdale's Psalter will be published before long.

This book is called "Mother Said So" because the tradition about God is handed on to most of us by our mothers, who taught us to pray. There is a Mother of us all, in whom the true tradition about God has been preserved and handed on with increasing apprehension from age to age,

through Old Testament and New Testament times down to the present. This Mother is the Holy Church of God which began as Israel, and in Christ became the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. This book tries to trace this tradition and to show with what weight of authority, of accumulated experience of God, it comes to us.

CHAPTER I

GOD

Our religion is a reasonable one, but it comes to us by revelation from God. He reveals to man the Evangel, the Good News, about Himself and about man. The Evangelical Charter is summed up in these well known words "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." Those words come from the third chapter of St. John's Gospel at the 16th verse (R.V.)

First we must think of what we mean by God. Who is God? Can you prove that there is a God? God is not proved, God is found. Columbus did not prove America: America was there all the time. Columbus had good reasons for thinking that if he sailed into the west, he would find another wonderful land. He hardly knew what to expect when he got there, but having faith, he set sail and kept sailing in spite of many discouragements, and at last came in sight of a sandy key with a few palm trees on it. It was Watling's Island, in the Bahamas, his first glimpse of America. Of course, there was much more to be found out about America after that first little

glimpse. He and those who followed him went a long way after that. All the time, America lay there in all its beauty, from the snowy Arctic down through the swamps of the Amazon, and on to the far tip of South America. There it lay, in sunshine and shadow, its great mountains and its mighty plains, its wonderful rivers, and great lakes, waiting to be found, waiting to be discovered.

So it is with God — we *find* God. At first perhaps we get a very little glimpse, but if we persevere, we shall find all the great riches of God's wonderful goodness and love. So, you see, God is found rather than proved. Without faith, Columbus would never have discovered America. Had he not had sufficient faith to keep on sailing into the west, then America might have waited a long time to be found. So it is with God. We have to have enough faith to set sail. Our ship, in which we set sail to find God, is a ship of prayer. We begin to speak with God in prayer, to tell Him what we have to say, and then quietly to listen and hear what God has to say in reply. It is in that way that men have found God. At the same time we should make a great mistake if we thought that faith and reason were contrary the one to the other. Columbus had his reasons for sailing into the west. His faith and his reasons ran along parallel with one another, but

reason could not carry him there without the help of faith. In the same way reason can never get you to God without the help of faith. Faith is not credulity, faith is prompted by good reasons.

There are good reasons for believing that there is a God. We might begin in one corner of a room and reason in this way. We might say, "I notice that every effect has a cause. No matter what happens, something causes it. If the door slams, something makes the door slam. What is it? It is the wind. But what causes the wind? I suppose it is the sun heating the air in some inland valley. That air rises and draws the cold air in from where I am. That makes a wind. So the door slams." You see, we keep pursuing this chain of cause and effect. We are led to suppose that there must be some original cause for all these effects. That cause I call God. You call it what you like, but I call that first cause God. So I see that there is reason pointing in the direction of a belief in God.

Then I can start in another corner of the room, and I can say to myself, "I notice that in the world in which I live there is some kind of plan. Someone has designed this world. I cannot believe that it came into being just by the operation of blind forces, or by mad chance." When I see beside a river a pretty little cottage which was not there last year, I do not say "Well I suppose when

the water was high in the spring, some boards were washed up there. They had some nails sticking out of them, and so they came together, and formed that little cottage." I know a little cottage does not come together in that way, by the exercise of mad chance. I know that if there is a little cottage, somebody planned it, somebody thought about it, someone designed it, someone executed that design, brought it into being, and so there stands that pretty little building. That little cottage is a simple thing compared to this great universe. When I see how all things fit together in this universe in such a wonderful way, I cannot but believe that there is a design and a plan, and if there is a design and a plan, there must be behind all things some intelligence who made that plan, and who carried out that design and executed it. I call the One who plans, God. You can call Him what you like, but I call Him God. And so I see another line of reason pointing toward the same conclusion as our first reason.

Then we can start in a third corner of the room, and we notice that wherever there is an idea, there is a reality which corresponds to that idea. I can think of no idea to which there is no reality corresponding. Now there is this very prevalent idea of God amongst races of very different kinds, amongst peoples of very different ages, amongst men, women and children very widely separated. I find an idea of God, an idea that

there is a Power behind the things which we can see, and the things which we can hear. Just behind what you can see, just behind what you can hear there is Someone, that Someone I call God. You can call it what you like, but I am sure that since there is this idea of God, there must be some reality corresponding to it.

Then I can start in a fourth corner of the room, and I can argue like this: "I notice that whenever there is an appetite, there is something to satisfy that appetite. Because there is hunger, I know that there is food somewhere to satisfy that hunger; because there is thirst, I know that there is water somewhere to slake that thirst; because there is a longing for companionship and love, I know that there are those who give companionship and love." Wherever there is a longing, there is sure to be something to satisfy that longing. Now there is a longing in the hearts of men for an arm stronger than their own to lean upon, for a friend who will never leave them nor forsake them, a friend who will never misunderstand them, a friend who will never "go back on" them, a friend who will always be faithful, a friend who will not change, a friend on whom they can absolutely depend. There is a longing for a friend like that. There is an aching void in every heart, which could be satisfied only with such a love as a friend like that could give. Now because there is that longing, and that longing is so preva-

lent among men and women and children, and I find as I read the literature of the past that this longing has been in the hearts of men through many generations, then I believe there is Someone who can satisfy that longing. I call that Someone God, you can call Him what you like.

Now all of these lines of reasoning, starting from different points, lead toward the same conclusion. They do not take you to God, but they certainly indicate the reasonableness of believing that there is a God. Only by the experiment of faith can we ever find out whether there is a God. That, of course, is the experience of every scientist. A chemist may have very good reason for believing that if he puts one chemical and another chemical together he will get a certain reaction, but he never knows for sure that it will be so, unless he puts the two together and makes the experiment. He must have enough faith in his reasons to make the experiment. Just so, we shall never come to God by reasoning about Him, and talking about Him, or even thinking about Him, we shall only come to Him by the ship of prayer. By speaking with Him, and listening to Him, we make the experiment, and we find that our faith has been justified.

But that is not why you first believed in God. The real reason that you believe in God, and that I believe in God, is that mother said so. My

mother taught me to pray. My mother taught me that when I prayed I was speaking with Someone who heard, and that is why I came to believe in God in the first place. I came to believe in God on authority. And that is not such a foolish thing to do. An engineer who is going to build a new bridge across the river, does not start with his own reason alone to guide him. He is guided very largely by the accumulated wisdom and experience of all the engineers who have gone before. They have worked out the mathematical problems involved, they have experimented and have found that certain strains and stresses must be provided for, they have experimented with different materials. Our engineer of today has the benefit of all that accumulated experience and wisdom, and he uses it all. It is true that he adds his own little bit of reason to theirs, he adapts what they have taught him to the particular place on the river where the bridge has to be built, and so he creates his bridge there, and in doing so he adds his little bit to the stock of authority which will be handed on to those who come after him. There is nothing foolish, and nothing unreasonable, and nothing credulous about accepting the authority of those who have gone before him. Mother said so, and that is really why I have come to believe in God. Mother said so because she in turn had been taught by those who went before her.

It would be interesting to see how all that tradition began, how all that tradition gradually piled up and how all that accumulated wisdom and experience was gathered. In our next chapter we shall think about that. We shall see that all the time man has been seeking for God, and long before man tried to seek for God, God Himself was searching for man, looking for man, eager to reveal Himself to the men, women and children whom He had made, and whom He loved. Psalm 63 is a beautiful Hebrew poem composed by someone who had the longing in his heart to know God, and to be known by God. Listen to his words and see how it calls forth in you a like desire.

"O God, thou art my God;
Early will I seek thee. My soul thirsteth for thee,
My flesh also longeth after thee:
In a barren and dry land where no water is.
Thus have I looked for thee in the sanctuary:
That I might behold thy power and glory.
For thy loving-kindness is better than the life itself:
My lips shall praise thee.
As long as I live will I magnify thee in this manner:
And lift up my hands in thy Name.
My soul shall be satisfied, even as it were with marrow
and fatness:
When my mouth praiseth thee with joyful lips.
Have I not remembered thee in my bed:
And thought upon thee when I was waking (wake-
ful)?
Because thou hast been my helper:

Therefore under the shadow of thy wings will I
rejoice.

My soul hangeth upon thee:

Thy right hand hath upholden me."

In our search for God we should make a great mistake if we thought that all the effort must come from one side, as though God were passive, and just waiting for us to find Him. That is not so. God is making every effort to get in touch with you. He constantly stands at the door and knocks, hoping that you will open the door of your heart and let Him come in.

One of the mistakes that many people make in prayer is that they want to do all the talking. They tell God their troubles; they tell God even their joys; they tell God perhaps their sins; and then they get up from their knees and give God no chance to make any reply. Prayer is talking with God, not just talking to God. God does the larger part of prayer. If we will only be still and listen, we shall hear Him speaking to us. We shall not hear him speaking in English, or Hebrew, or Latin, or any earthly tongue. He does not have to use earthly language. He can put the thoughts, straight out of His heart, straight into your heart. They do not have to go through your ears. If you will listen, God will speak. If you will persevere in listening day by day, little by little, you will come to realize that God has been speaking to you, and making Himself known

to you, and you will begin to see His loving hand at work in all that goes on round about you. You will begin to realize His constant presence with you. Above all, you will come to know that He is a Friend who will never leave you nor forsake you.

In our prayers then, let us not try to do all the talking, let us have our little say, telling God the glad things, the things that make us happy, thanking Him for His goodness, then telling Him the sad things, the things of which we are ashamed, the many ways in which we have neglected our brethren, and then let us tell Him the things that we hope for, things for ourself or for others. When that is done, let us keep still, fix our attention on some good thing that He has done, and as we keep our attention fixed on the goodness of God, listen and see whether He has something to say to us. Sometimes we may think that nothing has been said because we did not feel the words go in at our ears. We thought that no words went in, but we shall find as we go about our business, that the things that seemed so hard before are not so hard; that the temptation that seemed so strong before is not so strong; that the worries have gone, that the doubts have disappeared, that we begin to see clearly what we ought to do, and begin to have a good will to carry it out. In that way we shall know

that God has put His thoughts into our heart. Let us then, in our prayers, allow God to do His part. Don't let us do all the talking, but let us give Him His opportunity during our quiet and silence, to say what He has to say to us.

See Psalms 14 and 53.

"The fool hath said in his heart:
'There is no God.' "

The end of that foolishness is given in verse 6.

"There were they brought in great fear, even where
no fear was."

Man alone, weak and small, cannot but be terrified.

How different the condition of the man who knows God. See Psalm 23.

"I will fear no evil:
For thou art with me."

CHAPTER II

GOD SO LOVED

What is God like? How did men come to know what God is like? Many people thought they saw in the great works and forces of creation signs of mighty powers and intelligence, so they came to worship gods many, and lords many, a god of the sun or of the moon, a god of the sea or of the winds, a god of war or a god of love.. Such gods were often supposed to be at cross-purposes with one another, so that in pleasing one you might be displeasing another. Some people, on the other hand, came nearer to the truth in believing that there was a god for each tribe and nation. Such a god in a small tribe was a family god, almost like a father to the tribe. How could the one living and true God use these reachings up of mankind after a knowledge of God? Could He make Himself known to men through any of these approaches? He might have revealed Himself to mankind as one of the great nature gods. He might have revealed Himself as Jupiter or Apollo or one of the great gods of Egypt or Babylon, but had He done so, men might have known His power and even His wisdom, but they could scarcely have known Him as the God who is love. Many of the gods of the heathen were thought of as local, and present to their worshipers in a cer-

tain temple. The god of a wandering tribe would be with his worshipors wherever they went. They were on the way to realizing the presence of the True God everywhere.

As God looked down from heaven He saw one man, a member of a little wandering tribe of gypsy folk. This man's name was Abram. This man set forth with his immediate relatives, his flocks and his herds, to find new pasture land, and as he journeyed into the west his family became a new and separate tribe of people. Abram took time to stop and look and listen. He stopped many times in the desert, and in the sparsely pastured lands on the edge of the desert, and during these waiting times while the flocks were feeding, Abram looked at what went on around about him, and he listened, and became aware that Someone spoke to him. He called this Someone his God, the God of Abraham. This God he believed gave him this new name. He changed his name from Abram to Abraham. A wonderful thing had happened, the one living and true God, the Creator of all things, the First Cause of all things, the Designer of all, the One who is behind everything that we can see, and everything that we can hear, made Himself known to mankind first of all as the tribal God of this little unimportant people, the people of Abraham. He came to be known as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

To the south lies the great land of Egypt with all its culture, but it is not as one of the gods of Egypt that the true God makes Himself known. To the east lies the fertile valley of the Tigris and the Euphrates. There is a great culture there, yet it is not as one of the gods of that land that the true God makes Himself known. With wonderful humility, the God of Heaven reveals Himself as the tribal God of this little wandering gypsy people. Why does God choose to do it in this way? It is because God so loves. He could show Himself as a God of power and even as a God of wisdom through one of the gods of the heathen, but He could never in that way show Himself as a God who is love. As the tribal God of this little people, He is able to show Himself as a Father who loves and cares for those whom He has made. It is here that the great tradition begins of the true knowledge of what God is like. Abraham handed on the knowledge to his son Isaac. Isaac passed it on to Jacob, and so it was passed on to the sons of Jacob.

Then there came a terrible setback. The people of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were obliged to go into Egypt because of a great famine throughout their own land. It was while they were in Egypt that they came to be hated and despised. They were put into concentration camps. They were subjected to forced labour, and it seemed to them

that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had forgotten them. They lost faith in themselves, as they lost faith in their God. The God of Abraham had not forgotten them. During one of the efforts which the Egyptians made to stamp out this hated people, a foolish order was given that every little Hebrew male child should be slaughtered. A mother placed her little baby in a basket, and placed the basket in the bullrushes beside the river to hide him, so that he might not be slaughtered with the other children. It was there that the princess of Egypt found him. She heard his pathetic cries and sent her maidens to bring the little child to her. She made him her own son. He grew up to be Moses, a prince of Egypt. But blood is stronger than water. He could never forget his own people. His interest in them grew as he became a man. One day he saw an Egyptian ill-using one of his own people. He killed the Egyptian, and this made it necessary for him to flee from Egypt.

Out in the desert he found a wandering tribe that gave him shelter. He became a shepherd of that tribe, looking after the sheep, leading them about from one sparse pasture to another. It was then he had time to stop and look and listen. God was able to speak to the heart of Moses. He attracted his attention through a bush that burned and was not consumed, and Moses heard

the voice of God. God told Moses that he was to go to his own people to be their leader. The Hebrews never tired of telling the stories of Moses and of how he finally obtained from Pharoah permission to take the people out into the desert to sacrifice to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. His true purpose was to lead them away into a land of their own. You can picture those pathetic people with their bundles on their backs, poor displaced persons, going out into the desert.

They had just enough faith in Moses to follow him. They were scarcely a tribe or a people any more, for there was so little to hold them together, but out there in the desert God did a wonderful thing for them. They came face to face with the shallow Sea of Reeds, but it was too deep for them to cross. How could they go on? As they looked back, to their horror they saw a cloud of dust in the sky. Pharoah had changed his mind. He was pursuing after them to make them go back into bondage. What could they do? The Red Sea before them and Pharoah behind them. It was then that God sent a great wind which pushed back the waters of that shallow sea, so that the Hebrews were able to pass through safely to the other side. When they looked back, to their amazement the wind dropped, the waters turned, and Pharoah and his hosts were overwhelmed in the Red Sea. That was the first mighty act of God which impressed them. They realized now

that they must be of importance. God really did care for them. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had not forgotten them, He must have a purpose, a destiny for them. It turned them, from a set of poor displaced people without any centre of unity, into a people united by a great common experience.

Their religion, and our religion growing out of it, is based upon facts. Their religion, and our religion, is not based on bright ideas or new thoughts, but on mighty acts, great facts. What is a fact? A fact is a thing done. Who did it? God did it. The Hebrews were never tired of telling the story of how God rescued them at the Red Sea. This was the great fact on which their faith in Him was based. They believed that He could never leave them or desert them after having rescued them in such a wonderful manner. In the book of Psalms, in which we have their prayer book and their hymn book, we find them constantly referring to the mighty act of God which He performed at the Red Sea. Psalm 114 reads:

"When Israel came out of Egypt:
And the house of Jacob from among the strange
people,
Judah was his sanctuary:
And Israel his dominion.
The sea saw that and fled:
Jordan was driven back.
The mountains skipped like rams:
And the little hills like young sheep."

Over and over again in times of stress and trial they looked back, and rested their faith upon that great deed which God had done in the desert, when He brought them safely through the Red Sea. For a long time they were a wandering people, going about with their flocks and herds in that sparsely pastured country, and it was during that time of wandering that they came to know God better and better. There were always some of them who were ready to stop and look and listen. In the desert there was time to stop. They could take time to think about life, and about the world in which they lived, and about the God who took care of them. They looked. At what did they look? They looked at the mighty works of nature round about them. They saw the regularity with which the sun rose and set. They watched the coming and the going of the phases of the moon. Year by year they saw the stars move across the sky in their regular constellations. They noticed the coming and the going of the seasons, of the spring and the summer, of the autumn and the winter. All of this spoke to them of the faithfulness of God. They came to see that their God was true — that is, a God on whom you can rely, a God who does not play fast and loose with His people. They saw that they could trust Him, that He was dependable.

Then they also looked at the events of daily life, the things that happened to them as indi-

viduals and also as a people, and in all of that they saw the Mighty Arm and the Loving Hand of God at work. At times they were tempted to doubt Him, at times they were unfaithful to Him, but always the thought of God's mighty deeds which He had done, in creation and in rescuing them from the Red Sea, brought them back to faith in Him. Their faith was based on those great facts. They stopped and they looked, and as well as that, some of them listened. In the quietness and in the silence of the night, in the quietness of the desert or the hills, they were able to listen to the voice of God. Not all would listen, but there were always some who were ready to hear God speaking. They were God's special spokesmen and prophets. They knew that prayer was not only speaking to God, but listening to His voice. In the quietness they did hear God, and as they listened to God they came to know the meaning of what they had seen. As well as being true and reliable, God was also just and righteous. They considered His dealings with them, and came to see that He was always fair. He never played favourites. He was a righteous God.

They came by their listening to know something even better about Him, they came to know that He is a God of mercy and loving-kindness. That could only have been known to them by listening. There would be many things that they could see in the works of nature that might shake their

faith in His love, there would be those natural disasters that come from time to time. Even in His dealings with them as a people, they might sometimes doubt His justice for the time being, because they did not understand what He was working towards, and so they might also have doubted His love. In listening, God came to know them, and they came to know God, as one friend knows another. It was those listeners who were best able to tell the people the wonderful truth, that His mercy endureth forever.

It is in the Psalms that we hear the Hebrew people expressing to God their thoughts concerning Him and concerning life, and it is in the Psalms that, over and over again, they speak of His truth, His justice and His mercy. In Psalm 8 you can hear one of God's children as he meditates on what He sees in the great works of creation. He sings:

“When I consider thy heavens, even the work of thy fingers:

The moon and the stars which thou hast ordained;

What is man, that thou art mindful of him:

And the son of man, that thou visitest him?

Thou hast made him but little lower than the angels
(God) :

And crownest him with glory and worship.

Thou makest him to have dominion over the works
of thy hands:

And thou hast put all things in subjection under his
feet;

All sheep and oxen;
Yea, and the beasts of the field;
The fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea:
And whatsoever walketh through the paths of the
seas.

O LORD our GOVERNOR:
How excellent is thy Name in all the world!"

Here you see one of the sons of men realizing the great dignity to which God has called the human race. How wonderful is man since God is mindful of him! How wonderful the son of man since God visits him! He has made man just a little less than divine, and then He crowns him with glory and with honour. The Psalmist, of course, knows only what he can see with his eyes, as he gazes up into the heavens. We know now so very much more about all those wonderful works of God round about us. Not only have sheep and oxen and the beasts of the field been put in subjection under us, but even some of the mighty forces of nature are now under man's control. It is because of the wonderful dignity which God has given to man in providing him with a reasoning soul, that he is able to share with God in the work of creation. It is the possession of that reasoning soul that makes it possible for man to appreciate the works of God, and appreciation is the very first step towards friendship. So man finds himself capable of being the friend of God.

Another psalmist, in Psalm 19, gazes up at the

heavens, and hears them singing God's praises, not by sounds that he can hear, but by performing their work perfectly well, and so showing forth the glory and the wisdom of their Maker:

"The heavens declare the glory of God:
And the firmament showeth his handy-work.
One day telleth another:
And one night certifieth another.
There is neither speech nor language:
No voice of theirs is heard.
Yet their sound is gone out into all lands:
And their words into the ends of the world."

The psalmist sees that the great works of God are everywhere glorifying and praising Him. He sees also that while they glorify and praise the Father, they are everlastingly making known to every part of the earth the wisdom and the power of God. The greatest of all the creation psalms is Psalm 104. It is too long to quote it all here, but you can read it for yourself, and you can see one of God's children looking with great delight at all His works in creation. What is more, he sees the great delight that God Himself takes in the things that He has made.

"The glorious majesty of the LORD shall endure forever:
The LORD shall rejoice in his works."

So, as they looked at the great works of creation round about them, God made known to his Hebrew people His glory, His power, and His wis-

dom, and also His great happiness; His joy in His creation.

In Psalms 105 and 106 you see another way in which the Hebrews looked. They looked at God's dealings with them as a people. In these two Psalms they recite the mighty works of God in His deliverance and care of His people. They trace out their history, and they see how God has been leading them all along, and so they come to see how just and righteous He is. In a Psalm such as number 107 you see them looking at God's dealings with them as individuals. This Psalm is a great act of thanksgiving by groups of people who have been through various sorts of trials and troubles. They stand in groups in the temple court. Sacrifices of thanksgiving are offered on their behalf as they sing of the goodness of God in delivering them.

"O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is gracious:

And his mercy endureth for ever.

Let them give thanks whom the LORD hath redeemed:

And delivered from the hand of the enemy;

And gathered them out of the lands, from the east,
and from the west:

From the north, and from the south."

Then we see four groups of people. First, (beginning at verse 4) there are those who have been lost in the wilderness, and yet have been rescued by God and brought safely out of their hunger

and thirst to a city where men dwelt. Next, (at verse 10) there is a group of people who have been sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. They have been in captivity. God has heard their prayer and brought them safely out of the prison house. Here they are. They are gathered in God's temple to offer a sacrifice and to praise Him. The next group, (verse 17) are those who have passed through serious illness. They have cried to God, and He sent His word and healed them and they were saved from their destruction. Finally, verse 23, we see a group of people who have come through the perils of the sea. In the storm He has heard them. He has brought them safe to land. Here they are once more gathered in His Temple. By His dealings with them God has made Himself known to His people. By their contemplation of His mighty deeds on their behalf, their faith in Him is established.

Not all of the Hebrews stopped and looked and listened to God, but there were always a few who did. It took many, many generations before God was able to reveal Himself to the Hebrews as a God of truth and justice and mercy. No doubt it was in looking at the great works of creation that they learned of His truth and reliability, it was from watching His dealings with them as a nation that they learned of His justice and righteousness. Perhaps they learned of His mercy most

of all from listening. In the quietness God was able to make Himself known to a faithful Hebrew as one friend knows another. "I will hearken what the LORD God will say unto me: for he shall speak peace to his people, and to his saints, that they turn not again unto foolishness" (Psalm 85: 8.) Even when in times of trouble it seemed as though God had forgotten them as a people, or as individuals, still their faith was kept strong because of their listening to the voice of God. A little Psalm like number 13 makes this clear to us. The psalmist feels so sure of the friendship of God, that he is not afraid to rebuke God for the troubles in which he finds himself:

"How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD, for ever:
How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?
How long shall I seek counsel in my soul,
And be so vexed in my heart:
How long shall mine enemy triumph over me?
Consider, and hear me, O LORD my God:
Lighten mine eyes, that I sleep not in death;
Lest mine enemy say, 'I have prevailed against him:'
For if I be cast down, they that trouble me will
rejoice at it."

In the next verse we find a complete change of tone. The psalmist seems to have paused, to have listened. In the silence God spoke into his heart restoring his faith and trust. In verse 5 he cries out joyfully:

"But my trust is in thy mercy:
And my heart is joyful in thy salvation.

I will sing of the LORD, because he hath dealt so lovingly with me.

(Yea, I will praise the Name of the Lord Most Highest.)

The last line is found in the Greek Old Testament, but not in the Hebrew.

Such a prayer shows a wonderful faith in God. Although his circumstances have not changed, his troubles no doubt still continue, yet his attitude toward those troubles and circumstances has been changed by his faith in God, when in quietness he listened and God reassured him of His love and mercy. "My trust is in thy mercy: my heart is joyful in thy salvation."

CHAPTER III

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

With a sublime conceit that little Hebrew people, so unimportant in the eyes of the great nations of the world, came to believe that their tribal God was the God of all gods. They sang in Psalm 136:

“O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is gracious:
And his mercy endureth for ever.
O give thanks unto the God of all gods:
For his mercy endureth for ever.”

It was only a short step from believing that their God was the God of all the other gods, to coming to see that there could be but one living and true God, and that the other gods had no real existence. Psalm 82 is a strange psalm, and yet it makes clear how the Hebrews came to take this final step. God is represented as holding a divine assize. Before Him are gathered all the gods, and He reprimands them for the poor way in which they have done their job. They have been looked upon as the children of the Most Highest. Men are mortal, they must die, but these gods were supposed to be immortal, and to go on forever, but God, the one true God, takes away from them their dignity as immortal beings, and sets them down on a level with men, so that

they will die as all men must die. This is the way the psalm goes:

“God standeth in the divine congregation:
He is a Judge among gods.
‘How long will ye give wrong judgment,
And accept the persons of the ungodly?
Ye should defend the poor and fatherless:
See that such as are in need and necessity have right.
Deliver the outcast and poor:
Save them from the hand of the ungodly.’ ”

So God reprimands the gods who have not carried out their work of judgment in the nations to whom they were assigned. Then He turns to those round about Him and says of these gods:

“ ‘They will not be learned nor understand,
But walk on still in darkness:
All the foundations of the earth are out of course.’ ”

In other words, the world is in a very bad way, and the reason is that it has been so poorly governed by these false gods. Then He turns again to these gods and says:

“I have said, ‘Ye are gods:
And ye are all the children of the Most Highest.’
But ye shall die like men:
And fall like one of the princes.”

Then in the final verse of the psalm we hear the pathetic cry of the whole earth, all the nations who have suffered under false gods, crying out to

the true and living God to be their judge. Listen to that verse:

“Arise, O God, and judge thou the earth:
For thou shalt take all nations to thine inheritance.”

In this psalm we see the Hebrews beginning to realize that their God is the one and only God, and that in the end, He must be not only their God, but that He must take all the nations of the earth as well as the Hebrews to be His inheritance.

In Psalm 104 we hear one of God's children praising Him for His glorious work in creation. Here there is no mention of any other gods. There is but the one living and true God. He has His angels working under Him, but He reigns alone.

“Praise the LORD, O my soul;
O LORD my God, thou art become exceeding glorious;
Thou art clothed with majesty and honour.
Thou deckest thyself with light as it were with a
garment:
And spreadest out the heavens like a curtain.”

The psalmist sees all the great works of creation in close relationship to their Maker. The light is His garment, the heavens are a lovely tabernacle in which He dwells. The psalmist watches God at work in creation, laying the foundations of the earth, covering it with the ocean as a garment. The waters he sees are a garment for old mother earth. Then he watches the one true God at work sending the springs into the rivers, caring

for the beasts and the fowls of the air, watering the hills, bringing forth grass for the cattle, providing the green herbs, feeding man, making the trees grow that the birds may have a place for their nests; throwing up the high hills to make a refuge for the wild goats and the stony rocks for the little conies. Then he watches the heavenly bodies marking out the seasons, the moon and the sun, knowing their proper work and performing it perfectly. He sees that God provides the night for the wild beasts to seek their prey, and the daylight for man to go forth to his work and to his labour until the evening. Then he notices that he has quite forgotten to mention all the wonders of the deep, and so he tells of the sea wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts, and where the ships go. He sees that when God hides His face, all these created things are troubled, but that when God lets His breath go forth they are created, and He renews the face of the earth. The changing of the seasons all speak of His faithfulness and truth. The climax of this psalm comes when the psalmist sees that the Lord must be so happy in all His works. He says:

“The glorious majesty of the LORD shall endure for ever:

The LORD shall rejoice in his works.”

The psalm really comes to an end with the little dedication:

"I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live:
I will praise my God while I have my being.
And so shall my words please him:
My joy shall be in the LORD."

At some later time some dear old scribe feeling that this psalm contains no moral, provides one at the end. He says:

"As for sinners, they shall be consumed out of the earth,
And the ungodly shall come to an end."

One who can see the glory and the beauty and the wonder of God's creation as this psalmist did, scarcely needs good advice. His joy in the Lord will be so great that the goodness of God will lead him to repentance, and he will praise God not only with his lips, but with his life by giving himself up to the Father's service.

A very big step was taken when the Hebrews knew that there is but one living and true God. When you believe in gods many and lords many you cannot know that you live in a universe. You can only think that the world around you is a collection of things, some of them under the control of one master, and some under the control of another. There is a god of the sun, another god of the sea, another god of the winds, and sometimes these gods are at cross-purposes with one another. It is impossible to see that the world is a universe so long as you believe in gods many

and lords many. But as soon as you know that there is but one living and true God, the door is thrown open to science. Science would be impossible unless we knew that the world is all of a piece, that everything fits in together, that there is one great plan, and that all things have a place in that plan. We Christians have believed for so long that there is but one true God, that we have grown accustomed to the thought of the world as a universe, but it is an amazing thing that the Hebrews should have realized it. They did not have the corroboration of that truth which we now have in science. Science was as yet very primitive indeed. It could not have been solely by observation of the things around them that they came to know the oneness of God, and the oneness of creation. It must have been by revelation from Him. Far greater nations with higher cultures than that of the Hebrews, such as mighty Egypt with all its wonderful buildings, its great literature, knew nothing of the one true and living God. That mighty people believed in gods many and lords many. The same was true of the great cultures in the valley of the Tigris and the Euphrates; the same was true of the culture of Greece and of Rome. This little people perched up in their Palestinian hills knew something that the great nations of the world did not know, that there is one God and therefore the world in which

they live is a universe. This must have come by revelation from God.

In Psalm 115 we hear the taunt of the heathen who ask "Where is now their God?" To the heathen round about them the religion of the Hebrews seemed a poor and meagre thing. They had no great idol that they could show as their God. They had so little, as it were, to show for their religion in an outward way, perhaps only a box, the Ark, containing a few odds and ends, treasures which they had kept; two stone tablets representing the tablets that God had given to Moses on the mountain, a branch of an almond tree with some faded buds and a few almonds on it, a pot containing some mysterious stuff in the bottom of it, the manna, mementos of His dealings with them. To the heathen a box like that would seem a very poor sort of focus for devotion, and so they scornfully asked about the Hebrews "Where is now their God?" The Hebrews' reply:

"As for our God, he is in heaven:
He hath done whatsoever pleased him.
Their idols are silver and gold:
Even the work of men's hands.
They have mouths, and speak not:
Eyes have they, and see not.
They have ears, and hear not:
Noses have they, and smell not.
They have hands, and handle not;
Feet have they, and walk not:
Neither speak they through their throat.

They that make them are like unto them:
And so are all such as put their trust in them."

For all their worldly wisdom, the peoples of the world who worshipped the other gods, were as deaf and dumb to spiritual things as the idols that they worshipped. Later in the same psalm the psalmist turns to the true worshippers of God and says to them:

"Ye are the blessed of the LORD:
Who made heaven and earth.
All the whole heavens are the LORD's:
The earth hath he given to the children of men."

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob has complete control of heaven and earth. No department is left for any other god.

God so loved the world. He is seen to love all that He has made, every thing inanimate or living, every race, Hebrew and Gentile, every man, woman and child.

CHAPTER IV

GOD'S PLAN

Because the Hebrews knew that there was but one living and true God, and that He was their God, they saw that there must be a plan for the world, that this one true God must have had some good purpose in creating the world. They looked at God working through the events of their national life, you can read it in such a Psalm as 78, or in psalm 105 and 106. There you see the psalmist carefully going over all the big events of God's dealings with His people Israel. Here you see recited the mighty acts of God whereby He had redeemed them and led them all through the years. It is on these great deeds, these mighty acts of God, that the faith of God's people rests. Their faith in Him is founded, not on fancies or bright ideas, but on good solid facts. A fact is a thing done. God did it, and because God did these mighty works, His people believe in Him. They see in these mighty works the working out of His plan; they see their God working His purpose out as year succeeds to year. It was a great thing to know that God had a plan, that there was some plan for this world. It is a great thing for us to know that there is a blueprint. The wise men who take council for the nations of the earth

today do not have to create a plan, they have to find a plan, they have to find God's plan, the blueprint that He has made, and to see how the nations of the earth, and the individuals who belong to those nations, can fit into that plan. The Hebrews came to see that God is King, that He is the One who really reigns and rules, and that He rules according to that wonderful plan that He has made. Late in their history, after they had had the disappointment of kings who ruled over them but who were not like the divine King of Heaven, they came to see that Samuel had been right, that it was best that they should have no other king than the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel.

Late in the history, after their kingdom had passed away, they began to keep a festival of the coronation of God as King of Kings, over all the earth. In a naive way that little people, the Hebrews, restored after exile to their own land, hold in the rebuilt temple a festival for the coronation of God: they carry out all the old ceremonies.

Look at Psalm 47:

"O clap your hands together, all ye peoples:
O sing unto God with the voice of melody."

In the old days when they had had a king of their own, that is the way in which he was acclaimed. He was brought forth and shown to the

people, and the people with clapping of hands and shouting recognized him as their monarch. Psalm 47 goes on to show that this King was not only the King of the Hebrews, but the King over all the earth:

“For the LORD is high, and to be feared:
He is the great King upon all the earth.
He shall subdue the peoples under us:
And the nations under our feet.
He shall choose out an heritage for us,
Even the excellency of Jacob, whom he loved.”

After a king had been acclaimed with the clapping of hands and the shouting, then he went up with blowing of rams’ horns to the high place where the actual coronation took place.

“God is gone up with a merry voice:
And the LORD with the sound of the trump.”
Then comes a beautiful chorus:
“O sing praises, sing praises unto our God:
O sing praises, sing praises unto our King.
For God is the King of all the earth:
Sing ye praises with understanding.
God reigneth over the nations:
God sitteth upon his holy seat.
The princes of the peoples are joined unto the people
of the God of Abraham:
For God, which is very high exalted, doth defend the
earth, as it were with a shield.”

So we see God, as it were, enthroned and all the peoples of the earth called to come and do homage to Him. There are a number of other

psalms for the coronation of God as King of kings and Lord of lords: such psalms as 68, 93, 96 to 99 may be mentioned. Psalms 33 and 149 are “new songs” that were sung to God who now seemed to be the God of the whole earth. But what sort of plan is God’s plan for His world? Is it the plan of a dictator, a despot who lays down a terrible program in detail and forces that program through, so that if friend or foe gets in the way, friend or foe will be trodden under foot? No, it is no such plan as that. The Hebrews could see that because their God is a God of truth, because their God is a God of justice and righteousness, because their God is a God of mercy and loving-kindness, His plan for His world must correspond to His own nature. It must be a plan that is true and just and merciful. Moreover, they came to see that there is a place for every nation in that plan, and not only a place for every nation in the plan, but also a place for every individual; no man, woman or child is too weak or too poor to have his place in God’s purposes. Psalm 96 says:

“Tell it out among the heathen, that the LORD is King:
And that it is he who hath made the round world so
fast that it cannot be moved:
And how that he shall judge the peoples righteously.”

It took the Hebrew people many generations before they fully realized, that because God is true and just and merciful, and His plan for His world

is one of truth and justice and mercy, those who are to fit in with that plan must be themselves true, just and merciful. The Hebrews had the great prophet Amos to thank for making this abundantly clear to them. He helped them to see that gorgeous worship offered to God could not be acceptable unless it came from those who were trying to be like God. They in turn must be true and just and merciful because God is true and just and merciful. The great purposes of God could never be worked out, and come to a happy conclusion, except through people who were true and just and merciful. The Hebrews had for a time thought that God would work His plan out to glorify His own people, that He would tread underfoot all other nations and would exalt Israel. They longed for that great day of the Lord, when He would wind up the affairs of His universe in a great triumph for His own people. Amos was obliged to point out to them that the day of the Lord would be darkness and not light to those who were not true to the God of truth, justice and mercy. Such teaching, of course, could never be popular, and yet men knew that it was true. Little by little the Hebrews came to see that morality and worship could never be separated.

It was their knowledge of the truth, the justice and the mercy of God that gave them a standard of morality. They came to see that right and

wrong do not depend on custom alone. Right and wrong depend upon eternal principles: "I remembered thine everlasting judgments, O LORD: and received comfort." They could see that God must have judged certain actions and condemned them as wrong, and that those actions must always be wrong. Any act contrary to truth must be wrong, because it is contrary to the very nature of God, and must be contrary to His plan. Any action contrary to justice, any action contrary to mercy and loving-kindness must always be wrong, because it is contrary to the very nature of God Himself. The world that He has made must be constructed to work according to the principles of His own nature. So the Hebrews had a standard of moral judgments, a standard that would never alter. This laid the door open for a real science of ethics, for a real standard of moral judgments. The last part of Psalm 19 is a very beautiful little hymn in praise of God's everlasting and righteous law. It is written in that beautiful echoing metre which one finds in some Hebrew poems. There are three beats in the first half line with an echo of two beats in the other half line. You can almost hear it in the English of Psalm 19.

"The law of the LORD is an undefiled law, converting
the soul:

The testimony of the LORD is sure, and giveth wisdom
unto the simple.

The statutes of the LORD are right, and rejoice the heart:

The commandment of the LORD is pure, and giveth light unto the eyes.

The fear of the LORD is clean, and endureth for ever:
The judgments of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether."

As the Hebrew people came to realize that worship and morality must go hand in hand, they brought their forms of worship into correspondence with this great truth. Look at Psalm 15: here we have a little Service of approach to the worship of God. The worshipper stands outside the sanctuary and calls to the priests of the sanctuary asking them what is required of those who worship at that shrine.

"LORD, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle:
Or who shall rest upon thy holy hill?"

The answer comes back from the priests within the sanctuary:

"Even he that leadeth an uncorrupt life, and doeth the thing which is right:

And speaketh the truth from his heart.

He that hath used no deceit in his tongue, nor done evil to his neighbour:

And hath not slandered his neighbour.

He that setteth not by himself, but is lowly in his own eyes:

And maketh much of them that fear the LORD. . . ."

Then at the end of the Psalm the petitioner seems to have asked "What are the blessings that

will be received in this sanctuary?" And the answer comes back:

"Whoso doeth these things:
Shall never fall."

When you look at Psalm 24 you will see this same little form of Service in a more primitive style. Psalm 24 seems to be a procession for bringing the ark back again into the holy place after it has been carried forth into the battle. The priests and people as they come along carrying the ark in the midst of the triumphant and victorious army sing:

"The earth is the LORD's, and all that therein is:
The compass of the world, and they that dwell therein.
For he hath founded it upon the seas:
And established it upon the floods."

When they reach the gates of the temple they cry out to the priests within:

"Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD:
Or who shall rise up in his holy place?"

The answer comes back:

"Even he that hath clean hands, and a pure heart:
And that hath not lift up his mind unto vanity, nor
sworn to deceive his neighbour."

Then there seems to be the question: "What is the blessing that will be received from worship in this sanctuary?" The answer comes back:

"He shall receive the blessing from the LORD:
And righteousness from the God of his salvation."

Then the priests within the sanctuary call the attention of God to the people who are seeking Him, and ask His blessing upon them:

"This is the generation of them that seek him:
Even of them that seek thy face, O God of Jacob."

The people shout:

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye
everlasting doors:
And the King of Glory shall come in."

The priests within ask:

"Who is this King of Glory?"

The people outside reply:

"It is the LORD strong and mighty,
Even the LORD mighty in battle."

Again they cry out for the gates to lift up their heads, and again the priests within ask who it is who is to enter, and the cry comes back:

"Even the Lord of hosts, he is the King of Glory."

So the procession goes up, and the ark is borne in by God's joyful and triumphant people. Look at the requirements; in this psalm you find that they are not so much taken up with moral goodness as in Psalm 15. This psalm represents an earlier period. What is required here is "Even he that hath clean hands and a pure heart: and that hath not lift up his mind unto vanity, nor sworn to deceive his neighbour." Clean hands were

probably hands that had not sought the spoils in the battle, and the vanity to which some might have lifted up their minds, was no doubt "the Vain Thing," one of the false gods. There was always a temptation to think that possibly it might be well to cry out to these other gods in order to win good luck in the battle.

In all probability this little form of Service goes back to an even more primitive type, when in very early days, before there was a full realization by all of the one true God, travellers would approach some little sanctuary by the roadside, and would shout out to the priest within, "What's required for those who worship here?" The priest would cry back that certain ceremonial actions were required; the washing of hands, the abstaining from certain foods, the giving of certain offerings. Then the petitioner would ask "What good will it do me?" And the priest within would reply "You will have safe journey," or "Your cattle will increase," or "Your sheep will be protected from disease," whatever it might be. In Psalm 15 all this has been lifted up unto another level, a level of high morality. The Hebrews are beginning to see that they must be holy as their God is holy.

Psalm 95, the Venite, with which we are so familiar, shows the method by which God's people were made acquainted with the necessity of moral worship, with the worship which finds its fruition

in a daily life lived to please God. In Psalm 95 we see the people gathered in the great temple court. The choir sings:

"O come, let us sing unto the LORD:
Let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.
Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving:
And show ourselves glad in him with psalms.
For the LORD is a great God:
And a great King, above all gods.
In his hands are all the corners of the earth:
And the strength of the hills is his also.
The sea is his, and he made it:
And his hands prepared the dry land."

You can see the great multitude falling down and putting their heads to the ground as the choir sings:

"O come, let us worship and fall down:
And kneel before the LORD our Maker.
For he is the LORD our God:
And we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep
of his hand."

Perhaps at this point there is silence while the fire is applied to the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Amid the crackling of the dried sticks which are to consume the beast that is being offered, a rasping voice is heard. It is the voice of a prophet who cries out to the people at that point (or perhaps it represents the voice of God speaking in the hearts of His worshippers) warning them that all this gorgeous worship can be of no value, can-

not be acceptable before God unless it comes from hearts that are right toward Him, unless it comes from hearts that are ready to be obedient to Him. Listen then to the rasping voice of the prophet :

“Today, oh that ye would hear his voice.”

And then the mysterious voice of God is heard saying,

“ ‘Harden not your hearts: as in the provocation,
And as in the day of temptation in the wilderness.

When your fathers tempted me:

Proved me, and saw my works.

Forty years long was I grieved with that generation,
and said:

“It is a people that do err in their hearts, for they
have not known my ways.”

Unto whom I swear in my wrath:

That they should not enter into my rest.’ ”

So, in the midst of gorgeous worship, there is a warning to God's people. They are warned by being reminded by God of how they had stepped aside from His ways in the wilderness, how they had refused to listen to Him there, and now in these later days, when they know Him so much better, this later generation is warned not to do the same thing again. All over the world of that day gorgeous worship was being offered to various gods, but it seems doubtful if any other peoples fully realized the relationship between morality and worship. The little despised people of the Hebrews had it revealed to them by Almighty God,

that only those who try to be like Him in His truth and justice and mercy, can offer to Him worship that will be acceptable in His sight. The Hebrews were coming to realize that there is a wicked spirit of evil in the world, whispering into the hearts of men horrible unworthy things, but at the same time there is a loving and true God whose mercy is everlasting, and who is ever endeavouring to lead His people in the way of righteousness.

Look at that strange little psalm, number 36; it is sometimes called "the Oracle of the Wicked" because in the first four verses we have a description of what happens when men give themselves over to that spirit of evil. It might be translated something like this:

"Wickedness utters its oracle in the heart of the
ungodly,

There is no fear of God before his eyes.

For he flattereth himself in his own sight:

Until his abominable sin be found out.

The words of his mouth are unrighteous and full of
deceit:

He hath left off to behave himself wisely, and to do
good.

He imagineth mischief upon his bed, and hath set
himself in no good way:

Neither doth he abhor any thing that is evil."

Then there comes a complete change; instead of this dark picture of the Oracle of Sin, there is the beautiful picture of God's mercy. Listen to it:

“Thy mercy, O LORD, reacheth unto the heavens:
And thy faithfulness unto the clouds.
Thy righteousness standeth like the strong mountains:
Thy judgments are like the great deep.
Thou, LORD, shalt save both man and beast;
How excellent is thy mercy!
O God, the children of men shall put their trust under
the shadow of thy wings.
They shall be satisfied with the plenteousness of thy
house;
And thou shalt give them drink of thy pleasures, as
out of the river.
For with thee is the well of life:
And in thy light shall we see light.”

Then comes a prayer that God will continue forth His loving-kindness to them that know Him, that He will not let the foot of pride come against them. The psalmist sees that those who listen to the dark oracle of sin are fallen, that they are cast down, that they are not able to stand. There is on the other hand the oracle of God's goodness to which men may listen, be satisfied, and see light.

Because the Hebrews had come to see that their God was the one and only God, the Creator of all things, they saw that His plan must be an all-embracing plan; that it must take into consideration all the things which He has made, and that therefore there is no man, woman or child so weak or humble but has a place in that plan. It was no doubt this which made the Hebrews see that their God could never tolerate the oppression

of the weak by the strong. There are constant references to the widow, the fatherless and the stranger. Constant rebukes to those who disregard those who are weak. Constant calling upon God's people to treat with respect and justice even the weakest.

There was here a latent appreciation of the importance of the individual. Other religions might treat people in the bulk, might treat them as one undifferentiated mass, but the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel was seen to be a Father God who cared for His children, one by one. Everyone was important. It is so important to know that you are important: it is not important to be self-important, but it is so important to know that you are important in the eyes of God, that you have your place with Him, that in this great Universe there is a place for you. It may well be a very small place, but yet even the smallest cog in a great machine has its importance; if that cog fails to do its work, or is out of place, the whole machine may be thrown out of order. So the Hebrews came to see the importance of each individual. It was then that personal devotion to God began to have its place. Men came to God as individuals as well as a corporate body made up of His whole people.

Many of the psalms are plaints: the whole people in trouble, or single persons in trouble

crying to God for help and deliverance. It is true that some of these complaints may be national in which the individual speaking is the king or the ruler of God's people, interceding for them as a whole, but many of the psalms are personal complaints to God. It is very touching to see how free the psalmists are in speaking to God, how they will rebuke God, reminding Him of His former promises, reminding Him of His mighty acts in the past, and demanding that He fulfill the covenant which He has made. Very often in the course of these complaints there will be a pause. During that pause, a change comes over the heart of the petitioner, his faith in God is restored, and immediately afterwards you will find him crying out in joy and confidence that he knows God's mercy and loving-kindness is with him still.

Look at Psalm 11 :

"In the LORD put I my trust:
How say ye then to my soul,
That she should flee as a bird unto the hill?"

Then the petitioner tells God the troubles that he suffers:

"For lo, the ungodly bend their bow,
And make ready their arrows within the quiver:
That they may privily shoot at them which are true
of heart.
If the foundations be destroyed:
What can the righteous do?"

Then there comes a pause during which the petitioner waits upon God, and in that quiet time his confidence is restored. He cries out, in verse four:

"The LORD is in his holy temple:
The LORD's seat is in heaven.
His eyes consider (the poor):
And his eyelids try the children of men."

Or look again at Psalm 13 and see the great change that takes place between verses four and five. After bitter complaint by the petitioner there is a pause for silence and then that great cry of faith:

"But my trust is in thy mercy:
And my heart is joyful in thy salvation."

So we see the religion of the Hebrews becoming a very personal religion, as well as a great national and corporate worship of Almighty God. This appreciation of the importance of every man, woman and child by the Hebrew people, threw the door open for democracy. It is hard to see how democracy could possibly develop or flourish except where the importance of the individual is appreciated. The Hebrews have made the greatest contribution to this appreciation by their realization that God has a place in His plan for each one, that God cares for and keeps each of those whom He has made, and that none is too weak or unimportant to be regarded.

CHAPTER V

SET BACK TO GOD'S PLAN

The crown of ancient Hebrew knowledge of God was the realization that because He is the one living and true God, the Creator of all things, that therefore all nations should come and worship Him, that He is to be the God not only of the Hebrews, but of the whole world. Perhaps God made it known to them through their experience in being carried away into captivity, and living among the nations of the earth, and their experience in being dispersed all over the world, because their own little country could not support them all. There came to be Hebrew people in many parts of the ancient world, and wherever they were they still looked towards Jerusalem as their happy home. Perhaps in this way they came to see that their vocation was to be ministers of the LORD; that their job was to carry the good news of this one, true, just and merciful God to all nations of the earth. They did make a real beginning by welcoming proselytes to their family circle. Here and there all over the world men began to be attracted by this pure and beautiful religion of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel.

Look at Psalm 87 and see how God's people came to realize that no matter where you were born, if you were a true worshipper of the one living God, you would be reckoned as though you had been born in Jerusalem itself. Hebrews and Gentile proselytes are all the children of the Most Highest.

Listen to this lovely psalm (87) of Jerusalem, the mother of us all:

"Her foundations are (upon the) holy (hills):

The LORD loveth the gates of Sion

More than all the dwellings of Jacob.

Very excellent things are spoken of thee:

Thou city of God.

I will make mention of Egypt and Babylon: as among
them that know me.

Behold, Philistia also; and Tyre, with Ethiopia:

Lo, in Sion were they born,

Yea, of Sion it shall be said, 'Each and every one was
born in her;'

And the Most High shall establish her.

The LORD shall reckon, when he writeth up the
peoples:

That each of them was born there.

The singers also and trumpeters shall make answer:

'All my fresh springs are in thee.' "

In other words, all over the world fresh branches of Israel were growing up, fresh springs were bursting forth to increase God's true worshippers, and no matter where they were actually born, still God will write them down in His great book as having been born in Sion.

In Psalms 96 and 98 we see how clearly God's people realized that it was their duty to make Him known to the Gentiles. In Psalm 96 they sing:

"O sing unto the LORD a new song:
Sing unto the LORD, all the whole earth.
Sing unto the LORD, and praise his Name:
Be telling of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his honour unto the heathen:
And his wonders unto all peoples."

Little by little the Hebrews were coming to see why it was that God had rescued them long ago at the Red Sea. They began to see that His vocation for them was to be messengers for Him to the whole world, that first of all they should see the light of His countenance, and that then they could take the knowledge of that light out to others. Here was the reason for all His mighty acts on their behalf.

In Psalm 67 we see God's people asking His mercy and blessing upon themselves, in order that they may be able to make His way known on earth, His saving health among all nations. They ask that they may have the light of His countenance shed upon them, but in order that this light may go out into all the world.

"God be merciful unto us, and bless us:
And show us the light of his countenance, and be
merciful unto us;
That thy ways may be known upon earth:
Thy saving health among all nations.

Let the peoples praise thee, O God:
Yea, let all the peoples praise thee.
O let the nations rejoice and be glad:
For thou shalt judge the folk righteously,
And govern the nations upon earth.
Let the peoples praise thee, O God:
Yea, let all the peoples praise thee.
Then shall the earth bring forth her increase:
And God, even our own God, shall give us his blessing.
God shall bless us:
And all the ends of the world shall fear him.

In a psalm like this we see the very climax of God's revelation of Himself to the Hebrew people. It will remain for us to see why it was that having received this high calling, they fell short of it. Why did the Hebrew people fail to take the knowledge of the true God to the whole world? How was it that they were unable to persuade the heathen to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel?

Why did the Hebrews fail to carry out the glorious work to which God had called them? There was some excuse for them. During the centuries immediately before the coming of Christ the Hebrews were bitterly persecuted in their own land. Every effort was made by their Greek masters to turn them into Greeks. It looked for a time as though the true religion must be stamped out, for every Hebrew practice was forbidden, and every effort was made to entice the Hebrews to

give up their religion and their culture. Their holy places were defiled. Listen to Psalm 74. The few faithful Hebrews hiding away in the mountains cry out to God:

“O God, wherefore art thou absent from us so long:
Why is thy wrath so hot against the sheep of thy
pasture?

O think upon thy congregation:

Whom thou hast purchased, and redeemed of old.

Think upon the tribe of thine inheritance:

And Mount Sion, wherein thou hast dwelt.

Lift up thy feet, that thou mayest utterly destroy

Every enemy: which hath done evil in thy sanctuary.”

To the Hebrews nothing could be worse than that their holy place in Jerusalem should be invaded by Gentiles, soldiers who carried with them their banners, which to the Hebrews were evil tokens. Listen to the vivid description of the defiling of the temple:

“Thine adversaries roar in the midst of thy congregations,

And set up their banners for tokens.

He that hewed timber afore out of the thick trees:

Was known to bring it to an excellent work.

But now they break down all the carved work thereof:

With axes and hammers.

They have set fire upon thy holy places:

And have defiled the dwelling-place of thy Name, even
unto the ground.”

This last verse may very well mean that they actually lit the fires on the altars, and offered their heathen sacrifices in God’s holy temple.

“Yea, they said in their hearts, ‘Let us make havoc of them altogether’:

Thus have they burnt up all the houses of God in the land.”

Evidently it was not only the temple of Jerusalem that was destroyed at this time, but the little village synagogues were burnt down, too. Psalm 79 gives you another picture of the same terrible events. It was no wonder that having passed through these experiences, they tended to fear and to hate the Gentiles. Terrible prayers were uttered such as the last part of Psalm 83, beginning at the 13th verse:

“O my God, make them like unto the whirling dust:
(or the tumbleweed)

And as the stubble before the wind;

Like as the fire that burneth up the forest:

And as the flame that consumeth the mountains;

Pursue them even so with thy tempest:

And make them afraid with thy storm.

Make their faces ashamed.

That they may seek thy Name, O LORD.

Let them be confounded and vexed ever more and more;

Let them be put to shame, and perish.

And they shall know that thou, whose Name is
JEHOVAH,

Art only the Most Highest over all the earth.”

But even in a terrible prayer like that, there is still the recollection that the heathen ought to know the Name of the Lord, that they should be

seeking to know Him. Perhaps it is not to be wondered at that after generations of persecution, they should become a little hard-shelled nationalistic sect, and that they should largely forget their wonderful vocation to be the ministers of God to make His name known to all the nations of the earth.

But there was a deeper reason why the Hebrews failed. They failed, not because they were Hebrews, but because they were human beings. God had given to them the wonderful insight to understand that man is made in the image and likeness of God. Such an insight as that could only have come by revelation. It seems impossible that looking at man as he is in his fallen nature, anyone could have come to the conclusion that they were looking at an image and likeness of the one true and living God, yet when it is revealed to us it is so obvious, that this is the likeness in which God made us. We do share with God so many of His wonderful attributes. Like Him in our small way we can be creators and makers of things. Like Him we are possessed of understanding. Our understanding is very small compared to His great wisdom, and yet we do understand in a measure the world in which we live. Like Him we can see the beauty and wonder of creation and so we have a sense of beauty such as no other creature possesses. God seems to have wanted to share with

us His own joy in His creation. Man, like God, has a certain measure of freedom.

Due to man's selfishness, self-centredness and self-indulgence, that image and likeness has been defaced and largely obliterated. For this reason the Hebrews did not show in their own persons the truth, the justice and righteousness, and the mercy and loving-kindness of the one true God. It was not enough to speak about these things. They needed to be shown forth in the daily lives of God's people; only in that way could the heathen nations of the earth be attracted to the one true and living God. So it came about that the Hebrews failed to attract any but a few proselytes here and there from among the nations. By their failure, the Hebrews delayed for a time and partly frustrated God's plan to make Himself known to all the world. God is not easily discouraged. He is very patient. "The Lord is gracious, His mercy is everlasting and His truth endureth from generation to generation."

CHAPTER VI

GOD . . . GAVE

God did not allow the failure of His people Israel to stand permanently in the way of making Himself known to all mankind. God had known all along that the best that the Hebrew people could do in their fallen condition as human beings, was to prepare the way for a restoration of God's image and likeness in the person of His own Son. If God was ever to be known to the world, then it was necessary that someone who shared our human nature should in His own Life demonstrate the beauty of God's holiness, His truth, His justice, and His mercy. When God had begun to make Himself known to mankind He had chosen man's one soft spot. Poor selfish man still did love within the family circle with some measure of true love. Father, mother, and children love with a love not altogether unlike the love of God, and it was for this reason that God had chosen to make Himself known to mankind by becoming the tribal or family God of the Hebrews. Now that God had to make further plans, He again uses man's one soft spot. As God looks down from heaven He sees a very dark and discouraging world.

In Psalm 14, which is almost identical with

Psalm 53, God is described as looking down upon the children of men:

"The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men:

To see if there were any that would understand, and seek after God.

But they are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become abominable:

There is none that doeth good, no not one."

This is a very pessimistic view that the psalmist takes, for in spite of all the wickedness in the world, and in spite of man's failure to understand or seek after God, yet God does see here and there a bright spot. He sees a mother with a little child in her arms, and He knows that the mother would die for that child if necessary. He sees a man working hard with the sweat running down his face; He knows that man would work himself to death for that mother and that child. There is some semblance of unselfish love in the world, and it is here that God decides to break in once more. Perhaps if God should visit and redeem His people, if He should be born of a human mother, then He might receive love and understanding from a few. Perhaps this is the way that best of all God could make Himself known to the children of men. In times of trouble and persecution the Hebrews had rested their faith upon the mighty deeds which God had done for them. They went back and looked at all that long history, to the time when

God had called their father Abraham, to the time when He had delivered them at the Red Sea, to the time when He had given them David to be their king. They believed that God had made great promises to David, that of his seed, of his family, God would raise up righteous kings who would shield and guide His people, who would be shepherds to His flock. But in those bitter days of persecution it seemed to them that God had forgotten.

In Psalm 89 we have a pathetic cry from God's people, reminding Him over and over again of His great promises to David. Verse 20:

"Thou spakest sometime in visions unto thy saints,
and saidst:

'I have laid help upon one that is mighty;

I have exalted one chosen out of the people.

I have found David my servant;

With my holy oil have I anointed him.

My hand shall hold him fast;

And my arm shall strengthen him.

The enemy shall not be able to do him violence;

The son of wickedness shall not hurt him.

I will smite down his foes before his face:

And plague them that hate him.

My truth also and my mercy shall be with him;

And in my Name shall his horn be exalted.

I will set his dominion (hand) also in the sea:

And his right hand in the floods.

He shall call me, "Thou art my Father,

My God, and my strong salvation."

And I will make him my firstborn,

Higher than the kings of the earth.' "

But it looks to the psalmist as though God has forgotten all this. In Verse 37 he cries out with a bitter cry:

“But thou hast abhorred and forsaken thine anointed:

And art displeased at him.

Thou hast broken the covenant of thy servant:

And cast his crown to the ground.

Thou hast overthrown all his hedges:

And broken down his strongholds.

All they that go by spoil him:

And he is become a reproach to his neighbours.

Thou hast set up the right hand of his enemies:

And made all his adversaries to rejoice.

Thou hast taken away the edge of his sword:

And givest him not victory in the battle.

Thou hast put out his glory:

And cast his throne down to the ground.

The days of his youth hast thou shortened:

And covered him with dishonour.”

Then the psalmist cries out in verse 45:

“LORD, how long wilt thou hide thyself for ever:

And shall thy wrath burn like fire?”

“LORD, where are thy old loving-kindnesses:

Which thou swarest unto David in thy truth?”

But God has not forgotten David. He has not forgotten His promises. He has not forgotten His people Israel. He has not forgotten what He swore to Abraham. Although most of the Hebrews, and certainly their leaders, had forgotten their great catholic mission to take the knowledge of God into the whole world, yet there is still a faithful remnant, a little group, of those who have

not forgotten God's wonderful call to His people to go into all the world.

It is into the midst of this little group of faithful watchers that God's Son is born. There is Mary and Joseph; there is Zacharias and Elisabeth; there is Simeon and Anna, and no doubt there were others. When you read the Magnificat, the song of the blessed Virgin Mary, you see that the wonderful truths that God had revealed to His people are not forgotten. Again in that song of Zacharias, the Benedictus, you find that longing and looking for the coming of a better day. But best of all it is in the song of Simeon that you find still burning brightly the glorious light of the knowledge of a universal and catholic vocation for God's people.

On that first Candlemas Day, or ground-hog day, as our Canadian children call it, there came out from a dark little doorway in some narrow alley of Jerusalem a poor old man. According to our Canadian legend, if the ground-hog comes out on this day, and sees his own shadow, he goes back into his winter den again, and waits for six weeks before he comes out once more. So we have six more weeks of winter. When dear old Simeon came out from that dark doorway in that little alley he was not like the foolish ground-hog, he did not look at his shadow, he was not thinking of his aches and pains, of his disappointments, and

his long wait for the promise of God to be fulfilled. No, instead of that he looks up into the sunshine. There, crowning the great hill in Jerusalem, on top of that mighty rock, stands the beautiful temple of God, glittering in the sunshine. It is to this that Simeon looks. He climbs up the hill and enters into the temple; he has done it day by day, waiting patiently for God to show him the light of the world.

On this day when he enters the temple, he sees two poor peasants in the costume of Galilee standing humbly there. The woman has a little Baby in her arms, the man has a little cage with two pigeons in it. They are poor and humble folk; they wonder where they are to turn in order that they may find those who will perform for them the holy rite of redeeming this little firstborn son with two turtle doves. The kind old Simeon goes over to them. He takes Mary's little Baby in his arms, and as he gazes at that little Child, he knows that here is the answer to God's promise. He sees in this little Baby the light of the world. This dear little Child has come to restore the image and likeness of God to the eyes of men.

The old man utters that glorious hymn of praise:

“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace:
according to thy word.

For mine eyes have seen: thy salvation;

Which thou hast prepared: before the face of all the peoples;

To be a light to lighten the Gentiles: and to be the glory of thy people Israel."

What a marvellous thing it is that this poor old man should have retained the catholic ideal for God's people, that he should be able to see that it is the function of this little Child to be the light of the whole world. Simeon has things in the right order. His first thought is of a light to lighten the nations of the world, and his second thought is of the glory of Israel. Perhaps one of the reasons that Israel had failed was this, that they so often expected that God would glorify them first, and then after that the nations of the world were to be lightened by the knowledge of God.

As we watch that holy Child Jesus growing to man's estate, we see how God is shown to the world in Him, by the beauty of His own holiness. Truth and justice and mercy are no longer abstract ideas, they have become concrete in Jesus. He Himself is truth incarnate, justice and righteousness incarnate, mercy and loving-kindness incarnate. Even mankind, with eyes blinded by sin and ears deafened by iniquity, can, in the Person of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, see the goodness of God Himself.

Jesus said "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men

unto me.” Jesus has indeed proved to be the great magnet, drawing us up through Himself to the Father. He can be a magnet to draw us, because He shares our human nature. A magnet is made of iron and it can draw only things of the same nature as itself. It will draw things made out of iron, it cannot draw gold or silver. Our Blessed Saviour attracts us because He is made like unto us in all things except sin. His beautiful spirit, the lovely spirit in which He does everything, is the attractive force. He does all things simply and solely to please His heavenly Father. He has but one clear motive for all that He does, it is to serve the Father. It is this which gives simplicity and directness to His life. His eye is single, and so His whole body is full of light and cheerfulness.

Our blessed Saviour grows to man’s estate. He is happy; He grew up a happy Boy, and a happy Man. There is always the sparkle of the sea of Galilee about our blessed Saviour. He is a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, but He is never a sad Man. Sadness is wrong; it implies self-pity and despair. Our Lord Jesus, for the joy that was set before Him was willing to bear even the cross; He did so gladly. When the women bewailed Him on His way to Calvary He said to them “Weep not for me.” He was not asking for pity. He was glad to do what He was doing because He was doing it in order to draw all men to His Father. Because of His oneness of motive,

Our Lord's life had a wonderful simplicity, a directness which gave Him poise.

There is a Latin word which describes this quality in our Lord's character, it is "simplicitas". There is another word that describes His happiness, and that is "hilaritas"—cheerfulness, merriment. There is another word that describes His wonderful understanding and consideration of others and that is "benignitas". Our Lord does His kind deeds, not because it gives Him great satisfaction to do them, not in order that He may be praised and admired, He does them simply and solely to please His heavenly Father. He knows that His Father desires that His children shall be fed; He knows that His Father longs for the day when sickness and sorrow can be done away, and so our Lord does all that He does and says all that He says simply and solely to please the heavenly Father. It is this that gives such grace and beauty to all our Lord's deeds and words.

The Pharisees were very kind, but their kindness was hard to receive, because they were kind for the wrong reason. Their motives were mixed; they did want to serve God, they also wanted the satisfaction of knowing what good men they were, and they wanted the satisfaction of hearing the praise of others. That took away all the grace and loveliness from their actions. Our dear Saviour does the very same kind deeds, but does

them for the right motive, just to please His heavenly Father, and so we find, as St. Luke tells us, that He grew “in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men”. The heavenly Father was pleased with this Son of His, and men liked Him too. Now God’s people have Someone to show to the world as a true image and likeness of the Father. Jesus is the express image of the Father: “Christ who is the image of God” as St. Paul says. If the nations of the world should see the beauty of God’s holiness in the face of Jesus Christ, then they would be drawn and attracted to worship the one true and living God.

CHAPTER VII

HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON

When the Hebrews had had kings of their own, they had always hoped that God would give them a really righteous king, one who would be like God Himself, full of truth and justice and mercy. But never were they fully satisfied with the kings whom they had. Even David himself had many faults and failings. Some of the psalms are obviously written for an earthly monarch: for instance, Psalm 72 is a coronation psalm for some earthly king of the Hebrews. The court bard comes before the new monarch, and sings to him a beautiful composition that he has made. In it he tries to suggest to the new king a platform which, if he will follow, then all will be well with God's people:

"Give the king thy judgments, O God:
And thy righteousness unto the king's son.
Then shall he judge thy people according unto right:
And defend the poor.
The mountains also shall bring peace:
And the little hills righteousness unto the people."

Hebrew poetry depends on what is called parallelism. Instead of rhyming sounds as we do in English poetry, the Hebrews rhyme thoughts. The first half line usually rhymes with the second

half line; it says the same thing over again in slightly different words, or sometimes it will say the exact opposite, in order to give contrast. In this Psalm 72 you will notice "Give the king thy judgements, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son." The king's son, of course, is the same person as the king. Listen to the court bard laying down the platform for the new monarch:

"He shall keep the simple folk by their right:
Defend the children of the poor,
And punish the wrong doer.
They shall fear thee, as long as the sun and moon
endureth:
From one generation to another.
He shall come down like the rain upon the mown
grass:
Even as the drops that water the earth.
In his time shall the righteous flourish:
Yea, and abundance of peace, so long as the moon
endureth."

Then he goes on to draw a picture of all the blessings that will pour in to the land as a result of this good reign.

"His dominion shall be also from the one sea to the
other:
And from the River unto the world's end.
They that dwell in the wilderness shall kneel before
him:
His enemies shall lick the dust.
The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall give
presents:
The kings of Arabia and Saba shall bring gifts."
Again in verse 12 the court bard calls the king's

attention to a suitable platform for his reign :

“For he shall deliver the poor when he crieth:
The needy also, and him that hath no helper.
He shall be favourable to the simple and needy:
And shall preserve the souls of the poor.
He shall deliver their souls from falsehood and
wrong:
And dear shall their blood be in his sight.”

Then he goes on to describe more of the blessings which will come down as a result of a righteous king's reign:

“He shall live, and unto him shall be given: of the
gold of Arabia:
Prayer shall be made for him continually: and daily
shall he be blessed.
There shall be an heap of corn in the earth: high
upon the hills:
His fruit shall shake like Lebanon:
And they of the city shall flourish like grass upon the
earth.”

No king of Israel ever lived up to this high ideal. Over and over again in the Prophets, ideal kings are described, and ideal prophets, but no one ever lived up to the ideal. It is hard for us to appreciate the suddenness of our Lord Jesus. It is not as though the world had been gradually getting better, as though mankind had gradually become more and more like God. It was far different from that. The world was in a very bad way; it was full of injustice and ugliness and horror. Men were very far gone from the original righteousness which God had planned for them. Then

suddenly upon this dark scene there bursts this radiant figure, the figure of our Lord Jesus. He appears with real humanity, born in an out-of-the-way and despised province of the Roman Empire, born in an occupied country, born of a mother who was a displaced person, born by the roadside in a stable! He grew up to manhood as the village carpenter, living until He was thirty years old in an obscure hill village making yokes for oxen, door frames and window frames, helping to build houses, His hands rough with hard work, His muscles hard with toil, His face brown with the sun. To all appearances He is a working Man from a little colonial village in the north; from a province that even His fellow Hebrews despise, from Galilee of the Gentiles. Yet there is something startlingly lovely about Him.

As men come to know Him, they wonder at the gracious words that proceed out of His mouth. The common people hear Him gladly, there is a grace, a beauty, a charm about all that He says and does. There has never been anything quite like this before. Many of the things He says are hard sayings, they are not popular, and yet for all that, men and women and children find themselves drawn to Him. As time goes by, they begin to say "This is one of the prophets." On one occasion Jesus asked His close friends "Who do people say that I am?" They reply "They say that you are one of the prophets." "Yes," says our Lord,

“I know, but who do you think that I am? You who have been with me so closely.” It was then that Peter burst forth with the great truth. “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

In Jesus they believed that they did see the very beauty of God’s holiness itself. They see in Him all the goodness that they believe to be in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The time comes when they say “Only God could be as good as all that.” It is then that they begin to search the ancient Scriptures of the Hebrews. As they read of the great ideals held up there, the ideal of the perfect king, the ideal of the perfect prophet, they see in Jesus the fulfilment. They say to themselves as they read Psalm 72, “We never had a king who was really as good as all that.” And yet when they look at Jesus they say, “Here indeed is a King as good as all that. Here is One that we can follow even to death.” So, as they study over again the law and the prophets of God’s ancient people, they see that in Jesus all the ideals, and all the longings, and all the hopes are fulfilled.

He does indeed fulfill the law and the prophets; He fills the words of the law and the prophets full of wonderful new meaning. Indeed they do see in our Lord Jesus the truth of God, the justice and righteousness of God, the mercy and loving-kindness of God in human form. Here is God showing Himself to men in a way that they

can understand. God has always been so truly humble, so ready to make do with what He found at hand, so ready to make Himself known in whatever way He could, no matter how simple or lowly. So it is with Jesus, the only-begotten Son of the Father.

He chooses a little group of men who are to be the faithful remnant of Israel. He does not seek all over the world to find men of eminence, men of wealth, men of culture and education, or even men of very fine character. He makes do with the ordinary folk that He finds round about Him. In this way He shows His Father's wonderful faith in ordinary people. The heavenly Father has not given us up as a bad job. Peter and Andrew, James and John and the rest were just like ourselves when Jesus first called them. He might have chosen that little group of people out of any little congregation in His Church today. He keeps them with Him; with wonderful patience He puts up with their dullness of understanding, their failure to take in what He is trying to teach them. Over and over again He tries to tell them that just because He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, He will have to go up to Jerusalem to suffer, to be ill-treated, to die and to rise again. The spirit of ill-will in the world will never endure this perfect picture of the loveliness of God. The spirit of ill-will in the hearts of men of ill-will will never rest until Christ is crucified.

On each occasion when our Lord tries to tell His disciples of what is coming, they turn to Him with such unworthy requests. Peter wants to know "We have given up all to follow you, what are we going to get out of it?" James and John want to know whether they can sit the one on the right hand, and the other on the left in His Kingdom. It is they too who wanted to know if they might call down fire from heaven upon a little village because the inhabitants had refused to let them have their dinner there. Our Lord's wonderful faith in ordinary folk keeps Him from losing faith in Peter and Andrew and James and John and the rest of them. He has such faith in His Father that He knows that these men, now weak and foolish, can become great and noble characters, and can fulfill the great vocation that God has for them, which is to make His way known on earth, His saving health among all nations. Accordingly He has every hope for them, and his hope is not extinguished even by Peter's denial of Him at the last.

Above all His great love for them one by one encircles them, and finally wins them. As they come to understand His perfect faith in them, they have, for very shame, to become new men. Look at our Lord's wonderful way of showing Peter after His resurrection that He had not degraded him from his high position as an apostle

because of his denial of his Master. Our Lord said to Peter, "Simon, there is just one thing I want to know. Do you love me?" Peter says, "Master, you know I love you." Our Lord says "Feed my lambs." Again He asks him in slightly different words "Do you love me?" And Peter is grieved because He asked him again and he says "Master, you know I love you." And Jesus says "Feed my sheep." And then the third time Jesus asks him, and the third time Peter assures Him of his love, and our Lord says "Feed my sheep." And so Peter knows that he still has his job. It is this great faith of our Lord which gives Peter faith in Him, faith in himself, and faith in his brethren.

It is this great hope that our Lord has, this wonderful ringing note of hope, that there is in all that our Lord says and does, which gives hope to Peter and to the others. In spite of persecution, in spite of all troubles and trials they go forth to carry the good news into the world. It is our Lord's love for Peter and the disciples that helps them to love one another in spite of their frequent disagreements. It binds them together, and keeps them together, and because they stay together they have Jesus with them still, according to His promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst."

It was to this little group, this little faithful

remnant of Israel, this little faithful flock, that our dear Saviour committed all the treasures of His kingdom. It was this little group that He sent out into the world saying to them, "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, . . . teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Israel has not perished; this is the faithful remnant of Israel which once more takes up the banner of God to carry it out to the nations of the earth. The bulk of the Hebrew people went down a blind alley, and came up against a blank wall. There you see them standing today, as it were, against the wailing wall in Jerusalem. They have taken the wrong turn, but praise be God, the little remnant kept straight along on the path which God had planned; they go forth into the world to preach this good news to every creature, to carry to the world the knowledge of the one true God, who is true, and just and merciful, and to show to the world in the Person of our blessed Saviour, the truth and justice and mercy incarnate. Psalm 96 begins to be fulfilled.

"Ascribe unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people:
Ascribe unto the LORD worship and power.
Ascribe unto the LORD the honour due unto his Name:
Bring presents and come into his courts.
O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness:
Let the whole earth stand in awe of him."

CHAPTER VIII

WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH

There is a sense in which Jesus Himself is the true Israel: all the rest had departed from the righteousness of God. Jesus came to restore once more the true Israel. According to the flesh He belonged to that race, and He alone showed forth perfectly what the Father had intended the race of Israel to show forth. In the Book of Isaiah there are beautiful descriptions of the true servant of God. Israel was supposed to be that true servant, but as a people Israel always failed. Jesus takes up the torch that the rest of Israel was dropping. He snatches it up as it still smoulders, and carries on the true fire, the fire of perfect love to His Father. The torch only smoulders in the hand of the Hebrews; in the wounded hands of Christ, that torch burns up brightly and Jesus is the true light of the whole world. He carries out the vocation which the Hebrews had rejected, the vocation of carrying the knowledge of the one true God to the whole world.

But it was not our Lord Jesus' purpose to do this alone. He knew that His Father longed for the time when all His children would be faithful

to Him. He was able to say of our Lord Jesus, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." He longed for the day when He could say that of each one of us. Our Lord Jesus gathers around Him a little flock, men of good will, still full of faults and failings, but ready to learn of Him, ready to become one with Him, ready to receive from Him His own lovely grace and beauty of character, and to be with Him the faithful servants of God. It is this little flock which has become the one holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of which we speak in the Creed.

That little flock consisting of Peter and Andrew, James and John and the rest of them has never come to an end, it is still with us. Some by death were called into the immediate presence of their Master, but others were gathered in through Holy Baptism, brought to Christ, and with repentance and faith, were made very members incorporate in His mystical Body, the Church.

The Church is called to be "one," because God is one, and there can be but one Body of Christ. The Church is called to be holy because God is holy, and only by holiness can the Church fully show forth to mankind the beauty of God's holiness. The Church is indeed "holy", the members of the Church are potentially holy. They are in the way of being made holy, they are on their road towards holiness. It is their duty to be constantly

striving to follow in the footsteps of our blessed Saviour, so that each one, man, woman and child may be able to show in his or her measure something of the loveliness, of the beauty, of God's holiness.

The Church is "Catholic" for it is to carry out that great catholic vocation that God gave to His ancient people, the Hebrews. The Lord says, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." That is, "make disciples of all nations". Embedded in the word 'Catholic' you notice the syllable 'hol'. This sound bears a real relationship to our 'whole' and our word 'all'. The religion of the new Israel is for all nations, for all people, for all times. It is to teach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about God. It is to provide all that is needed for the whole of man's nature.

The Church is also "Apostolic"; that means that it is sent. Just as God sent forth the ancient Hebrews to carry the news of His nature and oneness into the world, so the Church of God is sent forth. Our Lord Jesus says, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." The Church is no voluntary organization. It is not as though our Lord converted a certain number of people to His ideas, and then said to them, "Organize yourself as you think best. Choose a president, and a secretary, and a treasurer." The Church of God,

like the ancient Israel of God, is a race, a royal priesthood, a holy people, called into being by God to offer up spiritual sacrifices, the sacrifice of praise and prayer, the sacrifice of holy lives lived just to please Him, all of which is represented in the offering of the Holy Eucharist—"This our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving".

The ministry of the Church is not one which is self-made. It comes to us from our Lord Jesus, through His holy apostles, who ordained and appointed the first ministers of His Church. So the commission has been handed on from generation to generation, and comes down to us. Our ministry is an apostolic ministry, a ministry that is sent. At the same time, at his ordination each minister receives directly from our blessed Saviour, the gift of His holy Spirit to give him the power to perform the functions of that ministry.

Nor is it only the clergy who are sent. Our Lord sends His whole Church, the Church is one Body, and we are all members of that Body by Baptism. As well as the orders of bishop, priest and deacon, there is also the order of the faithful laity. They are specially commissioned and strengthened at the time of their Confirmation, and sent forth to help carry on our Lord's work in the world. Every member of the Church is called upon to be hands and feet, lips and heart for Christ, by which He will go on His messages of

love, speak words of kindness, do His gracious deeds, and love the children of men.

We see fulfilled in a far higher and more wonderful way the ideals of the old Israel as we look toward our spiritual mother the Church, the renewed Israel of God. The Church is the true Jerusalem. She is on earth, but also in heaven. Praise God I have been born again into her. I am a citizen of Zion. I am free born. I can sing of the Church.

"I was glad when they said unto me:
We will go into the house of the Lord.
Our feet shall stand
In thy gates: O Jerusalem.
Jerusalem is built as a city:
That is at unity in itself.
For thither the tribes go up,
Even the tribes of the LORD:
To testify unto Israel, to give thanks
Unto the Name of the LORD.
For there is the seat of judgement:
Even the seat of the house of David.
O pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
They shall prosper that love thee.
Peace be within thy walls:
And plenteousness within thy palaces.
For my brethren and companions' sakes:
I will wish thee prosperity.
Yea, because of the house of the Lord our God:
I will seek to do thee good."

CHAPTER IX

BELIEVETH ON HIM

But Jesus is ascended. How can I see Him in His beauty of holiness? How can the Church show Him to the world, and showing Him, show the Father?

The four Gospels are like four signed portraits of Christ. Each portrait is taken from a different point of view, yet each is obviously the portrait of the same Person. There is a strong ring of truth and factualness about each of them. The home-like details, the restraint and reticence, the lack of effort to arouse the feelings, the utter simplicity, the economy of words, give the impression that each Gospel is the work of an honest man trying very hard to be true to the Person he is portraying. Each Gospel is so obviously the picture of the same Person. How could four men, setting out to draw an imaginary picture, have each succeeded in making one so true to life as this is? Again, is it likely that four men, or groups of men, could each have invented a character of fiction so morally perfect as the Christ whom we see in the four Gospels? Do different novelists hit upon the same fictional character?

The Gospels are the Church's books, the books of that little Flock, that Company of believers, the first of whom were gathered round Him by Jesus Himself during His incarnate life. In them the primitive Church presents its final mind concerning its Master. This is what the primitive Church thinks of Christ. As the Church lived in Christ, and pondered upon the traditions concerning Him which she received from the first eye-witnesses, she through her members, drew these four pictures of Him. It is a great advantage to have the four portraits. In a sense it gives us a four dimensional view of Christ. We see Him in three dimensions, as completely Man. We see Him also in a fourth dimension as truly God. In all four Gospels He is held up by the Church as the object of the Church's worship and adoration, God and Man. It does not require proof texts, or even proof miracles, to demonstrate that the primitive Church worshipped Christ as God.

The four portraits show Someone who is represented as truly human, and truly divine. Ignore His manhood as shown in the Gospels, and He becomes a meaningless figure without attraction. Ignore His deity, as shown in the Gospels, and again He becomes a meaningless figure making intolerable claims for Himself, and so not even good. Take Him as the Church presents Him in these four autographed portraits, and you see One like unto us in all things except sin, and one of

whom you are obliged to say, "Only God could be as good as all that. This is the goodness of God Himself." Here is the image and likeness of God restored once more. We behold His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Christ is no mere idea, or ideal, conjured up by a group of pious men, and pictured in an imaginary tale without historic basis. The four Gospels are the living testimony of a living Church to its faith that in Christ the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Before the thinking and the writing began, something, Someone, worth thinking about, and writing about, was provided.

There is a paradox in the Old Testament. God is constantly spoken of in an extremely anthropomorphic way. He is pictured as having hands, feet, fingers, sitting, standing, walking and riding, as having emotions like those of men. Yet for all this any attempt to represent Him as the Gentiles represented their gods, by an image, is strictly forbidden. In Christ this paradox is resolved. He is the express image of the Father. The image and likeness of God is restored in Him. Any statue of stone, or metal, or wood, which the Hebrews might have executed, would have been a totally inadequate picture of the living God. In Christ we have the image of God, executed not in wood or stone, but in flesh and blood, our own flesh and

blood. The Gospels give four vivid portraits of this adorable Person. He is no paper and ink Christ, the offspring of the conceptions or dreams of certain thinkers, but rather the offspring of Mary, of the family of David, of the race of Abraham, conceived by the Holy Spirit. He was born in Palestine in the reign of Caesar Augustus, He lived in the reign of Tiberius Caesar, He suffered and died while Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea. The Gospels show us, not a paper and ink, but a flesh and blood Christ with a date in history.

He enters fully into the whole of our human life. He claims no special advantages to make matters easier for Him. He chooses to come in the lowliest way, born of a Mother who is a displaced person, born by the roadside in a stable. He grows up in an occupied country. He lives in an obscure village in a despised part of a despised province. He shows Himself as the champion Man who bravely, cheerfully and lovingly meets all the sorrows and joys of life and triumphs in them all. That Carpenter from that obscure village of Nazareth has gone on winning the adoration of men over seventy generation among peoples of many races, among individuals of every kind of temperament, and degree of culture. The fact of the Church is the best proof of the factualness of the foundation on which the Church is based, the Rock which is Christ.

CHAPTER X

IN HIM

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me." These are all words used over and over again in the Psalms. (Psalms 119, 85, 27 and many more.)

Our Lord Jesus shows a new way in which we may live and please God. The old way of the law had proved unsatisfactory. Men were never able to be thoroughly faithful either to that eternal moral law which depends upon the nature of God Himself, His truth, His justice and righteousness, His loving-kindness and mercy, nor yet to the details of the Hebrew law.

The Pharisees made a valiant effort to keep the law strictly, and yet there was something about their lives that was not lovely. They were faithful in worship, they refrained from those things that were forbidden, they kept the ceremonies of the law most carefully, they were often very kind and generous, and yet there was something that spoiled it all. Their motive was not the right one. They did their good deeds partly to please God, but partly also for the satisfaction which they felt in being such good men. They were like little Jack

Horner who sat in the corner eating Christmas pie, he put in his thumb and pulled out a plum and said "What a good boy am I." There is something very repulsive about a little prig who is pleased with himself for being so good. The Pharisees appeared to have some idea that they could earn God's approbation and blessing, just as though every man is not obliged to say after he has done all that is required that he is still an unprofitable servant.

Our Lord Jesus did many of the same kind deeds which the Pharisees did, but when He did them they were lovely, because they were done with that one right motive, simply to please His heavenly Father. That was the spirit in which Jesus always acted. Indeed that spirit is the Holy Spirit—the third Person of the Blessed Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the love between the Father and Son. So great is that love that it is far more than an emotion. That love is a Holy Person. Perhaps it seems hard for you to see how love can be a person. Yet we see it in a smaller way day by day. Every little child is the love of his father and his mother, which has become a little person. As we can see it on that lower level, it is not impossible for us to conceive of the idea of the love of the Father for the Son, and the love of the Son for the Father, being an eternal Person coexistent with the Father and the Son, the One whom we know as the Holy Spirit.

Jesus gives to His faithful servants that Holy Spirit in order that they may do what they do, and say what they say, and think what they think, simply and solely to please the heavenly Father. It gives to all their actions and words and thoughts a grace which they could not otherwise have, a loveliness which they could not otherwise show. Jesus imparts to those who are faithful to Him, who come into personal contact with Him, His own grace and beauty of character. He imparts to them something of the beauty of the holiness of God Himself. That beautiful Spirit which He gives to us, leads us into the way, guides us, and shows us what we ought to do, and then gives us the courage and the strength to carry it out. That Holy Spirit, together with the grace and beauty of character of our Lord Jesus Himself, is imparted to God's people by the means of grace.

There are many means of grace; in Holy Baptism for instance we are put into the way of salvation. It is a great mistake to think of Baptism as a Service which has an end, to speak of Baptism as though it were all over for you or for me, to say "I was baptized." The right way to speak of Baptism is to say "I am baptized." "I am a baptized person." Baptism does not come to an end when the priest finishes the Service in the Prayer Book, that is the beginning of Baptism. Baptism will never come to an end until we are brought to the throne of God. Even then, we shall still be

very members incorporate in the mystical Body of Christ because of our baptism. We are born again into the Israel of God. Baptism is like a great stream, it is the stream of God's own life, the stream of God's own love. Into that stream we have been placed. It depends upon us whether we make use of that light and love which surrounds us. It is quite possible for people by wilful sins to climb out of that stream, or by pride to avoid making use of that stream. You may have made very little use of your baptismal grace so far, but it is not too late. Right now you can begin to drink in of that water of life, which will give you strength to walk in the way. Moreover, that wonderful stream of life will bear you along and help you forward if you will let yourself go.

Prayer is another great means of grace. As we open up our hearts to God day by day in prayer He can come to us with all His strength and goodness. Many people make the great mistake of giving too much of their prayer time to speaking, and certainly far too much of their time is spent in telling God what He is to do. God is glad to have His children ask Him for what they need, or what they think they need, but that is only a very small part of prayer. Our prayers should be largely given to thanksgiving. We learn this from the Hebrew Psalms and from the prayers of our Lord Jesus. Contemplation of the goodness of God will lead us to repentance. We should give

part of the time of our prayer to asking for His pardon. Then we shall tell God our own needs, the needs of those we love, and the needs of others, but even when all of that is said, less than half of prayer has been accomplished, for prayer is talking with God not just talking to God. We need to stop and look and listen as God's people Israel tried to do. It is in listening that God is able to pour His grace into our hearts. Prayer is not fully a means of grace unless we give God time to act. In your prayers then, stop and listen; while you are listening fix your attention on our Lord Jesus, picture Him to yourself as being shown to you in some incident in the Holy Gospels, listen to what He has to say to you.

The highest form of prayer, and that which is most acceptable and pleasing to Almighty God is corporate prayer, where two or three agree together in our Lord's Name. The Hebrew religion was a family religion. The Church is our true family. When God's family gather around His Table in His house, or if there is no Church building to which they can go, they gather together in any place, then the Body of Christ is manifested. Whenever two or three are gathered together, you are able to see some of the members of Christ's Body. You know that His Body can never be divided. Where we can see two or three members, we are sure that He is with us. It is in times of corporate worship that we can best of all come

before God to offer Him our praises, our repentance, our intercessions, but above all the great sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving in the Holy Communion. Then we come as a Body to present ourselves, our souls and bodies in union with our dear Saviour Jesus Christ. Because we are very members incorporate in His Body, we offer ourselves to the heavenly Father in order that we may be accepted in the beloved Son.

It is by that great emptying out of Christian people corporately in prayer and thanksgiving before God that we are made ready to receive further grace and heavenly benediction. Those who do not worship, are in danger of becoming like the Dead Sea. It is constantly receiving the fresh waters of Jordan, and yet, because it has no outlet, becomes salty and dead. So a person will become dead if he never empties himself out in worship to almighty God, and in loving service to his brethren. Once he begins to worship and serve, then his heart is thrown open so that God can pour into it His grace and heavenly benediction.

Another great means of grace is the reading of Holy Scripture; best of all the reading of Scripture when God's people are gathered together and the Church of God holds up our Saviour in the Holy Gospels according to the Church's year. The Church rightly divides the word of God, present-

ing to God's children day by day that portion of Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testament which is best for them. But as well as listening to Holy Scripture in the Church, and to the expounding of Holy Scripture by the clergy of the Church, each of us should use the Holy Scriptures as a means of grace in our private devotion. We should take a short passage from one of the gospels and meditate upon it, trying to reconstruct the story, trying to see it as it was, asking our Lord Jesus to show Himself to us; asking the Holy Spirit to take these things of Christ and show them to us.

The Holy Spirit will do this, very much as a mother takes a picture book to show a child. The mother says, "See, here is little Red Riding Hood. Here is her basket. Here is her grandmother," and so forth. At once the whole picture springs into life for the child. Even so the Holy Spirit of God will take of these things of Christ in the Bible, and will show them to us. He will say to us, "See. Here is your Saviour. Look at His courage. Look at His kindness. Look at His cheerfulness. Look at His bravery. Look at His love." So our hearts are drawn into loving union with our Lord Jesus.

Then again in the events of daily life we may find means of grace. If we are watching we can see as the Hebrews did the loving hand of God at

work just beneath the surface of the things that happen round about us. There will be constant occasions for ejaculatory prayer—just sending up a little dart of prayer and thanksgiving to God. “Thank God for this.” And, “God bless so and so.” And as surely as we empty ourselves a little in such prayer, God will at once fill us with grace.

Jesus not only shows us a new way to live, He is the Way. In a very real sense our dear Lord is the Road; He is a new and living Way to the Father, not an old way like the highway that gradually gets rougher and rougher, as the years go by, and finally has to be rebuilt, but a new and living Way like a beautiful river which is ever flowing on. Jesus is that Way, we were placed safely in His arms in Holy Baptism, and there we can remain if we will. Jesus bears us along the way. He helps us along the way. It is true that as the years go by, He expects us to walk at His side, but His hand is always close, we can always grasp it at any moment. Jesus is Himself that true and living Way which leads to the Father. He is the Jacob’s ladder between earth and heaven. A ladder must touch both the ground and the place to which it leads. Our Lord Jesus touches both earth and heaven because He is true man, born of Mary. He touches us. He understands our language. He feels for us. Because He is the only-begotten Son of God, He touches

heaven. He understands God's language. He feels for the Father. He can interpret the Father to us, and us to the Father. Jesus is indeed the Way, the Jacob's ladder. It is only through Him that we can ever cross that chasm that lies between us and God. God is so other than we are in all His wisdom and power and greatness and holiness, that Jesus is the only bridge, and the ladder which makes it possible for us to come to the Father.

Confirmation is another means of grace. Our dear Lord Jesus took the children up in His arms, that is like Baptism. He laid His hands upon them and blessed them, that is like Confirmation. From the very first we find the apostles praying for the baptized, and laying their hands upon them that they might receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Jesus still uses the hands of His ministers to give to us a fresh outpouring of that beautiful Spirit of grace, a Spirit which is, indeed, the Eternal God, God the Holy Ghost. Confirmation, like Baptism, does not come to an end when the Bishop's hand is removed. God's Fatherly hand will always be over us; His Holy Spirit will always be with us. Do not say "I was Confirmed," say "I am Confirmed." "I am a Confirmed person." In Hebrew there is one word for "breath", "wind" and "spirit". The Holy Spirit is the Breath of God and the Wind of heaven.

In many houses in the South a tunnel or breeze-

way is built through the centre of the house. It is so faced that the prevailing winds will come that way. In the hot and sultry weather, when there is the slightest breeze there will be a little freshness in that breezeway. When I was Confirmed, the Bishop, on God's behalf, placed me in the breezeway, where that refreshing breath of God, the Holy Spirit, is always blowing, and there I still am in God's breezeway, and at any moment I may breathe in that breath of Life. It may be, that at the time of my Confirmation I made little use of the grace that God had for me in that holy Service. It may be that through nervousness, or through indifference or carelessness, I did not at that time make proper use of God's grace and heavenly benediction, but at any moment I may begin to use my Confirmation grace. It is not "I was Confirmed", it is "I am Confirmed", and as a Confirmed person I can make use of the grace of Confirmation day by day. Confirmation is the means by which God helps us to be firm, to stand out against the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil, giving us the strength and the courage to refuse to allow the spirit of evil to push us around.

Then again, God has given power and commandment to His ministers to declare and pronounce to his people being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins. From time to time,

Christian people in spite of all the help that God gives, do, of their own fault, of their own most grievous fault, fall into sin. There are sins of pride, sins of lust and intemperance, there are sins of selfishness, there are sins of neglect. Some of them are so serious that although a Christian person may be truly repentant and God may already have forgiven him, yet he has a sense that he ought to beg God's pardon in a formal way, and receive a formal assurance of that pardon. At times like that, a man or woman can go to God's minister and open his grief. The minister, in Jesus' Name, can give to him not only good advice, but above all he can give to him the good news, the assurance of God's pardon and mercy. He can give to him a pledge to assure him that God has accepted his repentance, and through our Lord Jesus does give to Him the forgiveness of all his sins. Very little progress in the way can be made so long as a person is burdened by a sense of guilt and shame. Once he has told it out, and laid it down at our Lord Jesus' feet, and received God's pardon and absolution, then he can look cheerfully into the future. As God forgives and forgets, so He will permit His child to forget. In the day of judgment none of those things of which we have truly repented will be brought up against us. Therefore there is no need for anyone to look back with vain regrets after pardon has been received.

He can look cheerfully forward into the future, and can begin to make progress in the way.

Then there is that great means of grace—the Lord's Supper, the Holy Communion. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life." As we walk in the way, we need food for the way, and Jesus provides us with that spiritual food. He Himself comes to us in this Holy Sacrament. We come into living touch with Him. The Body of Christ is given, taken and eaten in the Holy Supper after a heavenly and spiritual manner. The hand and means by which we take that precious gift is faith. It is not our faith which creates the gift, the gift is there because of Christ's institution and promise. We know for sure that He will not fail us. All that is necessary is for us to put out our hand in faith to receive the gift. No one can rightly do this, who is not truly repentant for his sins. None of us can ask the Lord Jesus to come into a heart where there is unrepented sin. When He came in the first place, He was born in a stable. We do not wish to ask Him now to come into hearts that are like a stable, full of all sorts of ugliness and filth. We desire that our hearts may be pure and clean, mansions prepared for Him, to welcome Him when He comes. When He comes, He comes with all His goodness, with all His grace, with all His loveliness of character. He comes to bring those gifts to us. He comes to work upon us from

within. How often a school teacher must wish that she could get inside the minds of her children. It is so hard to get the lessons in through their ears, and their eyes. It is so hard sometimes to make them understand. Jesus can come, not only into our minds, but right into our hearts, to work upon us from within. We all of us need help from outside of ourselves. In the Holy Communion that help comes for us. That help is our Lord Jesus Himself, our Saviour and our Heavenly food.

Jesus says "I am the truth."

All through those long generations the Hebrew people were seeking the truth about God, and God was seeking to make His truth known to man. They learned it here a little, and there a little. It came to them a little at a time, gradually the door opened, until at last it is wide open in our Blessed Saviour. In Him the whole light of God shines forth. He is the truth. He not only comes to tell us the truth about God, and the things of God, but He is, in His own Person, the very Truth. He is the truth about God, and the truth about man. He shows us what God is like. As we see Him going about doing good, healing the sick, blessing the children, feeding the hungry, being kind to poor sinners, loving us enough to die for us, then we know what God is like. But as well as this, He is at all times showing the Father what we are

like. By His perfect life of obedience as a little child, as a boy, as the carpenter in Nazareth, by His daily living, He was showing forth God's praise, not only with His lips but with His life by giving Himself up to the Father's service, and by walking before the Father in holiness and righteousness all His days. He was showing the Father what the Father had always longed to see—perfection in His children. Jesus is the truth about men. In Jesus we see what man was meant to be—man in the true image and likeness of God. By those very same actions and words He shows us what we were meant to be like. He shows us the truth about man, and gives us the example which we can follow.

There is another sense in which our Lord Jesus shows us the truth about man. When we see His perfect goodness, then it helps us to see how very far gone we are from that original righteousness which God had planned for us. There is nothing which can convict us of sin better than to see our poor shabby little bit of goodness against the clear loveliness of Christ. Our goodness has such a tattletale grey compared to the perfect goodness of Christ. Our sins stand out with startling ugliness, when viewed in the light of the beauty of Christ's holiness. So we see that our Lord is the truth about God and about man.

Finally, our Lord Jesus says "I am the life."

Our Lord Jesus gave to His Church not only the new and living way to the Father and the perfect truth about God and about man, but in His own person He gives us also everlasting life. As St. Paul says, "The wages of sin is death. But the gift of God is eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ." We shall consider that in another chapter.

CHAPTER XI

SHOULD NOT PERISH

To a Christian person, life beyond the grave is a matter of great importance. It is somewhat disconcerting to find so little reference to the subject in the Old Testament, and indeed in the Psalms to find some very disturbing words about the finality of death.

"The dead praise not thee, O LORD:
Neither all they that go down into silence."

Psalm 115:17.

"For in death no man remembereth thee:
And who will give thee thanks in the pit?" Psalm 6:5.

"Dost thou show wonders among the dead:
Or shall the dead rise up again and praise thee?
Shall thy loving kindness be showed in the grave:
Or thy faithfulness in Destruction?
Shall thy wondrous works be known in the dark:
And thy righteousness in the land where all things
are forgotten?" Psalm 88:10-12.

The Hebrews for the most part seemed to think of the condition of a man after death as a mere existence, which was less than life. The place of the dead was looked upon as a great pit, a dark and gloomy place beneath the earth, where the shades of the dead dwelt, but scarcely lived. Some

references to this lonely place would seem to locate it far beneath the earth itself, and even below “the waters which were under the firmament”.

Sick men cry to God in their fear of death. They sometimes express themselves in a very dramatic way. They speak as though they were just on the point of slipping into that dreadful place. It is like a great trap. Its snares are already entangling the dying,

“The snares of death compassed me round about:
The pains of hell gat hold upon me.”

Already the dying man feels his feet being sucked down in the quagmire as, deep down below the surface, the earth begins to give way to the waters of the great deep below the firmament. He cries

“Take me out of the mire, that I sink not:
O let me be delivered from them that hate me, and
out of the deep waters.

Let not the water-flood drown me,

Neither let the deep swallow me up:

And let not the pit shut her mouth upon me.”

Psalm 69:15, 16 see also 1 and 2, and Psalm 40:2.

The Hebrew word Sheol is variously translated “pit”, “grave”, “hell”. It is the name of the gloomy dwelling of the dead. Here the shades of the departed remember nothing, are unable to praise God any more. They are cut off from the living, and they are cut off from God Himself.

The Hebrew could not imagine man being a real person apart from the body.

“Cast off among the dead,
Like unto them that are slain, and lie in the grave:
Who are out of remembrance, and are cut away from
thy hand.” Psalm 88:4, 5.

There are a few “Intimations of Immortality”. Care must be taken even with these, for we must not mistake a dramatic description of restoration to health from the jaws of death, for a reference to the resurrection from the dead.

One psalmist in his sickness cried out to God,

‘What profit is there in my blood:
When I go down to the pit?
Shall the dust give thanks unto thee:
Or shall it declare thy truth?
Hear, O LORD and have mercy upon me:
LORD, be thou my helper.’ Psalm 30:9-11.

When God restored him to health again, he sang this psalm of thanksgiving. See Psalm 30:1-3.

Thou LORD hast brought my soul out of hell:
Thou hast kept my life from them that go down to
the pit.

This is not a reference to resurrection, but to recovery from sickness. There are however some other psalms which do seem to have life after death in mind. Such may be,

My flesh shall rest in hope.
For why? thou shalt not leave my soul in hell:

Neither shalt thou suffer thy holy (pious) one to see corruption.

Thou shalt show me the path of life;

In thy presence is the fulness of joy:

And at thy right hand there is pleasure for evermore.

Psalm 16:11, 12.

or again

They lie in hell like sheep, death is their shepherd,

Their beauty shall consume in the sepulchre and have no abiding.

But God hath delivered *my soul* from the power of the grave:

For he shall receive me. Psalm 88:14, 15.

In this Psalm there seems to be a distinction between the careless prosperous man, who will follow the generation of his fathers and never see light, but be like the beasts that perish, and the righteous man who will have dominion over the careless in the morning by being received into God's company.

The Hebrew ideas about what comes after death seem very gloomy and indefinite compared with the glib assurances of some of the Gentile thinkers, (See Cicero "De Senectute", Cap. xxiii, Sec. 82-85) who take for granted that they are going to walk about in the place of the departed, conversing with the notables who have died before them.

The Hebrews were deeply impressed with the gulf which separates God and man. They be-

lieved that man was made in the image of God, but they did not presume to take to themselves all the prerogatives of God. The gods were thought to be immortal (See Psalm 82:6, 7.)

The Hebrews were well aware that they were mortal, that the life they lived must come to an end. The wages of sin is death, because God cannot allow tyrants to go on forever. It is quite clear to us that it would be a terrible thing if the despots and tyrants of this world knew that they could go on always. Death is always stalking them and in the end snuffs out their poor little mortal life. But every sinner is in a sense a despot. We have all tried so hard to get our own way. We constantly catch ourselves putting ourselves first in our thinking and our acting. It would certainly not be well for others that we should not go on for ever in this mortal life, nor would it be well for ourselves. It is hard to think of anything more terrible than to go on growing older and older, less and less able to enjoy the things of this world. Becoming more sick and tired of ourselves and unable to bring it to an end in any way. Some people's idea of everlasting life is very inadequate. They think of life after death as being just a continuation of this sort of life going on for ever and ever. If everlasting life is only a quantity of life, and no different in quality to what we now experience, then it would certainly not be worth

having. The time would come when we should long to be relieved of it.

The ancients came to believe that a few very great heroes were assumed into the heavens, and there dwelt as gods. The Hebrews believed that such holy men as Moses and Elijah, had escaped death. There was only one place for such men to go. It was to God's own dwelling place above the heavens. The Hebrews had the grace to see, that because they were sinners, God could not allow them to go on indefinitely. The more conscious they were of sin, as their moral sense was enlightened by God, the more they saw the justice of "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

It is to the credit of the Hebrews that they did not presume to expect to share the prerogative of the gods—immortality—, far less to share in the eternity of the one living and true God. Immortality is the continued existence of personalities. It is a much smaller thing than eternal life. The continued existence of self-centred persons, who go on for ever and ever being just themselves, with all their defects of character, may rightly be an existence of torment. Far better for them to go to "the land where all things are forgotten". To be sick and tired of oneself, to have no means of self-satisfaction, to be forever lonely and shut out

by self-centredness from the fellowship of God, would be hell indeed.

Eternal life is a very different thing. There is only One who is eternal. That is the LORD. The One who has always been able to say I AM, and always will be able to say I AM. The One who is forever becoming,

“O God, creation’s secret force,
Thyself unmoved, all motion’s source.”
An ever active “I AM”.

(St. Ambrose. tr. J. M. Neale)

CHAPTER XII

ETERNAL LIFE

Eternal life then is God's kind of life.

It was in order to bring that life to men that our Lord came.

“God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,
That whosoever beliveth in him should not perish,
but have eternal life.” St. John 3:16.

Are we not all the sons of God? No, not in that sense. We are His sons by creation, in something of the same sense in which we say “Alexander Bell is the Father of the telephone.” But Alexander Bell had children, who were his begotten children, of the same nature with himself. They were like Him. They shared his life. The telephone, wonderful as it was, was not so dear to him as his own begotten children. The Son is of the same being as the Father. His life is the eternal life of the Father. He is God from God. He brings into the world this wonderful gift of God's kind of life. “The wages of sin is death.” You can earn that. “The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” You cannot earn that. As well try to earn a billion dollars with an hour's work. It is a

gift so great that earning it is out of the question. It can only be had as a gift.

What is eternal life like? Since it is God's kind of life, it is a life of perfect happiness. Our little bit of human happiness which we enjoy here is in proportion to the unity of our personality. To be happy you need to be well integrated, to be like Jerusalem, "at unity in" yourself. Not to have mixed motives, not to have a personality tending to split. Mind you, pleasure and happiness are not the same. Pleasure is the satisfaction of one part of your being for a limited time. Happiness is the satisfaction of the whole of your being quasi-permanently, a much bigger blessing. God is perfectly at unity in Himself. He must therefore be perfectly happy. Another source of human happiness is fellowship. The best integrated person could never be content as a lonely individual. His nature demands fellowship. God for all eternity has had perfect fellowship within Himself. Father and Son have forever loved, enjoyed and associated together in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. What a thrilling life must God's life be. It is that happy life which He offers to you through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Keep still sometimes, and think of that great ocean of happiness which is the life of God Himself. It is all about you and through you. There is never any need to be sad. Sorrows we shall

have, crosses to bear, as Jesus had, but no sadness, only joy in the Lord.

Jesus died for you. He took that dreadful pay envelope for sin, "the wages of sin is death." He made available for you the gift of eternal life. Your mortal life with all its limitations, disappointments and inadequacies will come to an end, but who wants it to go on for ever and ever? Some people think they can move to some mild climate, and there go on indefinitely. They welcome any cult which promises health and wealth, long to live. Anything rather than go through the grave and the gate of death. The glorious resurrection is nothing to them. The true Christian does not hang on to this world. An atomic bomb can wipe out this mortal life. It cannot wipe out the eternal life of God. If you, if yours, have accepted that gift, you have nothing to fear. "O death where is thy sting." What is more, eternal life is not something you must wait for until after death. Eternal life is here and now. God does not want his children to approach the dark gate of death, without the sure and certain hope, the sure and certain knowledge, that they already possess the gift of eternal life.

But how can a man, with his limited capacity, receive such a gift? It sounds like talking of putting the ocean into a pint pot. Do not suppose for a moment that you can receive eternal life as a

neat little package, to be preserved as a treasured keepsake in some safe spot. Eternal life is so great, that it is more like a mighty river ever flowing round you, and through you, and on to other people. Eternal life is dynamic. It cannot be enclosed and contained. But what is eternal life in terms of humanity? It is like the life of our Lord Jesus when he was here upon earth. He restored the likeness of God in humanity. Study His life of grace and loveliness as it is shown to you in the holy Gospels. That is eternal life in terms of humanity. Unbelievable as it seemed on first thoughts, we see in Jesus that eternal life is not incompatible with human nature.

How can I accept this priceless gift? "That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." Faith is the hand which you put out. Faith means trust in Him. Confidence in Him. It involves a complete surrender of yourself into His loving care. Jesus knows what we are like. He bears our humanity still. He knows that we desire to know the time and the place when we can come into contact with Him, and receive the gift. We need pledges to assure us that we have received the gift. By Baptism you are brought into living contact with Him. The gift of eternal life is made available for you, and more and more, day by day, you can be appropriating that gift. In Baptism you become *the*

Child of God. Day by day thereafter you must become what you already are. A baby boy is born. His mother rejoices that a man is born into the world. He is a little man, but he will have to become what he is. He must grow up into the measure of the stature of his father. You too after Baptism must grow up to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, to the perfect man, the image and likeness of God. Stop and think. "I am baptized." "I am in that mighty stream of the eternal happy life of God. It flows through me and around me, and on to others. I can live happily in the strength of that life." The gift of eternal life is the great privilege of the new Israel in Christ Jesus.

Week by week, or even day by day, I will renew my personal contact with Jesus in Holy Communion. At his Holy Table I shall be confronted with my living Saviour, who died and rose again for me. He will pour into me fresh supplies of His gift of eternal life through his sacred humanity. "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thy body and soul. The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life." If you have this gift of Eternal Life then death loses its sting and the grave loses its victory.

Mortal life comes to an end, but you still go on endowed with this glorious gift of God's own sort of

life. It is very necessary that you should have started to live that sort of life here before death. In the third chapter of St. John's Gospel, the 16th verse, we read: "God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." By nature we must perish, "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust", but by God's good gift through Jesus Christ, we shall not perish, we shall share in that glorious and happy life of God. We shall be integrated, well integrated, not just integrated within ourselves, but we shall be made at one with God. That will be our aim and object. We shall rejoice in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. With Father, Son and Holy Spirit and with all the company of heaven we shall enjoy that companionship.

More and more we grow into that life and more and more are we received into that life. More and more are we made One with God. More and more are we welcomed into the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. This gift of Eternal Life is so great and wonderful that the ancient Hebrews never seemed to have had any inkling of such a life. They began to think that there might be a resurrection of the dead. They began to believe that there might be life after death. The Pharisees believed in such a life, the Sadducees denied it, but the sort of life in which the Pharisees believed, their

kind of resurrection, must have been very far short of this glorious life which is made known to us by our Saviour Jesus Christ. Only through His life and death and resurrection could men appreciate the possibility of man receiving the life of God. Only in Christ could that great life of God become a possible gift for man to take. Only in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ could man receive such an assurance of God's love and mercy, that he could have the faith necessary to put out his hand and take that gift.

This glorious gift of eternal life is so much greater than any little "intimations of Immortality" to be found in the Old Testament, or the classics. We are not immortal. Our bodies will die. Our poor weary old carcasses will go back to dust, but we have the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. We are to share God's kind of life, His happy and holy life of heaven.

Will it be so different to this life that we shall be out of place? No, Jesus in His glorious resurrection gave forty days to showing us what it will be like, He made it clear in the simple and limited way possible to our present understanding. He walked with His friends. He talked with them. He ate with them. He got their breakfast ready for them. He was the same dear Friend He had always been. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever." He shows us that there is a

reality about the resurrection. There is a real relationship between this present life, and that. It will not be utterly different. As He knew them, and they knew Him, so we can expect to know one another.

Get to work then to learn the lessons of this earthly life, for it is a school for that life. The things of this world are probably three dimensional pictures of the true good things of that life, just as the pictures and maps in the school are two dimensional pictures of the real things beyond the school. But, above all, use your hand of faith to receive and grasp more and more the gift of God, eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

What an amazing but glorious story it is, the story of how the accumulated wisdom and accumulated experience of God, which we call Christian tradition and authority, was gathered. It is a long journey from Abraham to our Lord Jesus, and from His ascension, through the succeeding centuries of the Church's history to my mother, who taught me to speak with God in prayer. It is a long journey and a thrilling one. My mother in her vocation and ministry, handed on to me the good News of God. Our Mother the Church is witness and keeper of that holy tradition. Through her children, both clerical and lay, she passes on this accumulated experience of God's revelation of Himself to mankind.

NOTE ON HEBREW POETRY

Hebrew poetry has this peculiarity that instead of rhyming sounds, as we do in English poetry, Hebrew rhymes ideas. This has the advantage, for those who do not read Hebrew, that even when turned into English the ideas can be recognized as rhyming with one another. Take the well known Psalm 114.

When Israel came out of Egypt:
rhymes with

And the house of Jacob from among a strange
people.

“House of Jacob” is another name for “Israel”,
and “strange people” is another way of saying
“Egypt”.

Look at the rest of this Psalm and you will see
that it is made up of pairs of rhyming ideas,

“The sea saw that and fled:
Jordan was driven back.

The mountains skipped like rams:
And the little hills like young sheep.

What aileth thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest:
And thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?

Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams:
And the little hills like young sheep.

Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord:
At the presence of the God of Jacob.

Who turned the hard rock into a standing water:
And the flint-stone into a springing well."

This is the simplest form of parallelism, as this type of rhyming is called. Identical or similar ideas are rhymed. Sometimes however opposite ideas are rhymed by way of contrast.

Look at Psalm 138, verse 6.

For though the LORD be high,
Yet hath he respect unto the lowly:
As for the proud, he beholdest him afar off.

Here you have two contrasting thoughts, God's height and man's lowliness, and God's respect to the lowly contrasted, with his keeping the proud afar off.

Sometimes there is a criss-cross arrangement. The first half line is reflected in a fourth half line, while a second half line is reflected in a third half line. See Psalm 24, verse 4.

Even he that hath clean hands, and a pure heart:
And that hath not lift up his mind unto vanity, nor
sworn to deceive his neighbour.

"Clean hands" is parallel to freedom from dishonesty.

"Pure heart" is parallel to freedom from trusting in false gods.

Sometimes there is a beautiful stairlike arrange-

ment in which the Psalmist works up to a climax. See Psalm 93, a psalm about God as King.

“The LORD is King,
And hath put on his apparel:
The LORD hath put on his apparel,
And girded himself with strength.

or again at verse 4

The floods are risen, O LORD,
The floods have lift up their voice:
The floods lift up their waves.
The waves of the sea are mighty,
And (the waves) rage horribly:
But yet the LORD, who dwelleth on high is mightier.”

By wave on wave you are tossed ever higher until at last you come to the vision of the LORD.

Although Hebrew poetry is not rhymed according to sounds, yet it does make use of alliteration of sounds, and of similar devices. Many of the cases of alliteration cannot be shown in the English, but some of the similar devices can be shown. Look at Psalm 29, the Psalm about the thunder storm, which rumbles around the mountain valley, and speaks to the psalmist of God's voice. Note the repetition of the word “ascribe” three times in the first two verses. Then note the repetition of the word “voice” in the rest of the psalm:

“Ascribe unto the LORD, O ye mighty:
Ascribe unto the LORD worship and strength.
Ascribe unto the LORD the honour due unto his
Name:
Worship the LORD with holy worship.

The voice of the LORD is upon the waters;
It is the glorious God that maketh the thunder:
It is the LORD that ruleth the sea.
The voice of the LORD is mighty in operation:
The voice of the LORD is a glorious voice.
The voice of the LORD breaketh the cedar-trees:
Yea, the LORD breaketh the cedars of Lebanon.

The voice of the LORD divideth the flames of fire;
The voice of the LORD shaketh the wilderness:
Yea, the LORD shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh.
The voice of the LORD maketh the hinds to bring
forth young,
And strippeth bare the forests:
In his Temple doth everything speak of his honour."

In Psalm 121 also there is a similar ringing of one insistent note like that of a bell. In Psalm 121 the word is "keep", which in Hebrew is the same as "preserve". In this psalm the petitioner looks around at the hills crowned with temples and high places. Some of them are to false gods such as the Baalim. He asks himself to which of these can he address his prayer with hope of help. He answers his own question at once. His help can come only from the one true God. Then the oracle of God speaks to him, either by the mouth of God's priest or prophet, or directly into the petitioner's heart, assuring him over and over again that the Lord "keeps", (preserves), is his "keeper", (preserver). In Hebrew the one root of the word rings out over and over again. It is a

soft word in Hebrew, so that the Psalm is like a lullaby.

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills:
From whence cometh my help?
My help cometh even from the LORD:
Who hath made heaven and earth.

He will not suffer thy foot to be moved:
And he that keepth thee will not sleep.
Behold, he that keepeth Israel:
Shall neither slumber nor sleep.

The LORD himself is thy keeper:
The LORD is thy defence upon thy right hand;
So that the sun shall not burn thee by day:
Neither the moon by night.

The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil:
Yea, it is even he that shall keep thy soul.
The LORD shall preserve thy going out, and thy
coming in:
From this time forth forever more.”

NOTE ON THE USE OF THE PSALMS BY THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Every psalm has a life situation which called it forth. In the majority of the psalms it is possible to tell, in a general way, what that life situation is. Some psalms are great acts of joy or hope built around some well known praise shout, which the people could use as a refrain and chorus,

“Alleluia, praise the Lord.” (Psalm 135)

“For his mercy endureth for ever.” (Psalm 136)

“The Lord of hosts is with us.” (Psalm 46)

Times of great public rejoicing would call forth such psalms. The Church can rightly use them for the same purpose, rejoicing in Christ.

Some psalms are hymns of pure praise to God for being what He is, and doing what He does, Psalms 8, 19, 29, 33, 65, 66, 100, 103, 104, 114, 117 for instance.

Many psalms are laments in which the sufferers pour out their complaint before God, and seek His aid. Such psalms are sometimes built around the cry “How long?” Some of these laments are of private individuals, such as, Psalms 3, 6, 11, 13, 17, 22, 31, 35, 38, 42, 43, 51, 54, 55, 69, 88, 102, 130, 140-143. Some of these laments are corporate cries for help. Even some which

are worded in the first person singular are corporate. The "I" is the whole people. The spokesman is the king or high priest. See Psalms 44, 74, 80, 83.

A number of psalms are royal psalms for some earthly ruler. Psalm 20 is for use when the king comes to offer prayer before going forth to battle. Psalm 21 is a thanksgiving for victory on his return, or else a thanksgiving on the anniversary of his accession. Psalm 45 is a poem recited at a young king's marriage. Psalm 61 is a prayer for a king in time of trouble. Psalm 72 is a poem recited before the king on the day of his accession or coronation. Psalm 2 is a prayer of a king, probably at the time of his accession, when petty subject kings take the opportunity of throwing off his yoke. Psalm 110 is another poem, containing an oracle, uttered before a newly anointed priest-king. Psalm 18 is a thanksgiving for victory. Psalm 89 is a national lament after the defeat in battle of some Judean king.

Other psalms were composed to celebrate the reign of God, who is the King of kings. In Psalm 47 God is crowned as King of kings. In 93, 96, 97, 98, and 99 His reign is glorified.

Are we justified in taking such psalms and applying them to our Lord Jesus, and to events in His life? At times Christians have supposed that

the chief original purpose of such psalms was to foretell events in our Lord's life. Some have supposed that the writer was aware that he was foretelling something about a coming Messiah. The truth of the matter is far more wonderful than that. These psalms, which originally had no other purpose in the mind of the author, than to fit them for the human situation of his own time, are found to fit even better the situation of our Lord Jesus in His incarnate life. For instance, take Psalm 45. The poet laureate or court bard has composed this poem for recitation at the marriage of a young king. He uses the usual flattering language of his day and place.

"My heart is astir with a goodly matter;

I speak of the things which I have made concerning
the king;

My tongue is the pen of a ready writer."

He stands before the king and the assembled nobility. He says,

"I can hardly wait to recite the poem which I have composed for the king. It has been an easy matter to compose a poem about such a wonderful young king."

"Thou art fairer than the children of men:

Full of grace are thy lips,

Therefore God hath blessed thee for ever."

The flattery goes on for many verses.

Then the court bard turns from the king to the little princess, who has come to be his bride. She is a poor little foreigner. She is marring her pretty eyes with tears. She is homesick.

“Hearken, O daughter, and consider; incline thine ear:

Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house.

So shall the king have pleasure in thy beauty:

For he is thy lord (master) and worship (honour) thou him.”

Then he goes on to flatter the little queen.

“No young king of Israel or Judah was ever so fine as all that,” says the devout Christian, “but our Lord Jesus is even better than all that. People marvelled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. But has He a bride? Yes, the Church is his bride.” Taken in this way, the psalm takes on a deeper meaning than the original author could ever know. The court bard who composed it, did flatter, but he also had an ideal of what a king ought to be like. Jesus realizes that ideal, and more than fulfills that hope.

The other royal psalms can all be taken in the same way. They come to be suitable for festivals in honour of events in our Lord's life, His birth, His manifestation to the Gentiles, etc. Psalms celebrating the coronation of God as King of kings are rightly referred to our Lord Jesus, and can be used to celebrate His Advent His Epiphany, His Ascension.

His passion can be celebrated by some of the personal or national laments. Jesus in His humanity shares with us all our troubles and sorrows. So many of these laments have a sudden change of tone between the first and last parts. A silence seems to have intervened in which God restored faith and comfort to the soul by some direct message.

Psalm 22, quoted by our Lord on the cross, is a lament of someone so sick that he is at the point of death. For twenty-one verses he cries out to God who seems to have forgotten him. Between verses 21 and 22 something happens in his soul. His faith is confirmed. From crying out:

“My God, my God, look upon me; why hast thou forsaken me:

And art so far from my health, and from the words of my complaint?”

and so on for 21 verses, his heaviness is suddenly turned into joy as he sings:

“I will declare thy Name among my brethren:

In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.

O praise the LORD, ye that fear him:

Magnify him, all ye seed of Jacob.”

and so on for eleven verses of confidence and praise.

It is well to note that “My God, my God” is a cry of faith, even while the petitioner is full of trouble. God is still his God.

Our Lord on the cross utters His great lament,
“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”
“I thirst.” “It is finished.”

His lament, like so many of the laments in the psalms, ends in a cry of confidence,

“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”

These, too, are words from Psalm 31, verse 6, a psalm which may well have been used as a Hebrew child’s evening prayer.

As our Lord shared our human situation he can very well share in the use of psalms composed to meet human situations. We in turn may well apply these psalms to situations in His incarnate life. The more a person studies the life situation which called forth a psalm, the more suggestive that psalm becomes when applied to our Lord.

Note: the point of a complete change of tone in these laments. Between verses 4-5, Psalm 13; between 6-7, Psalm 28; 20-21, Psalm 31; 22-23, Psalm 69; and others.

There is much to be learned about how to bear the cross. Complain to God, not to other people. Be quite frank with God. He likes His children to talk up to Him. He wants us to feel sure of Him. Then when the complaint and cry for help has been uttered, keep quiet for a while. “Be still, and know that I am God.” In the silence faith will be restored. The circumstances may not be changed, but your attitude to them will be changed.



